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# SARE

**Southern African Review of Education**

**A Review of Comparative Education,  
History of Education and Educational  
Development**



# SACHES

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## THE SOUTHERN AFRICAN COMPARATIVE AND HISTORY OF EDUCATION SOCIETY

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Southern African Review of Education

A journal of comparative education, history of education  
and educational development

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## CONTENTS

<b>EDITORIAL</b>	3
<b>ARTICLES</b>	
Zacchaeus Bukari and Loyiso Jita <i>Partnerships for educational development in Africa: Evidence from Japanese professional development programmes for science teachers in Ghana and South Africa</i>	7
Vitallis Chikoko and Lydia Aiping <i>The school cluster system as an educational reform: Evidence from Namibia and Zimbabwe</i>	25
Carol Bertram <i>Procedural and substantive knowledge: Some implications of an outcomes-based history curriculum in South Africa</i>	45
Robert Guyver <i>Towards a definition of protocols when embedding the national and the civic in a history curriculum</i>	63
Sofie Geschier <i>'Nobody says how people died of heartache!': Constructing a primary narrative in a pedagogical setting</i>	79

Rejoice Nsibande and Maropeng Modiba 97  
*Curriculum as a product of an activity system: Translating  
policy in the teaching of History*

## **BOOK REVIEW**

Hlengani Baloyi on 117  
*The Challenge of Learning: Improving the Quality of Basic  
Education in Sub-Saharan Africa: Quality, Equality and  
Democracy*

## **SACHES MEMBERSHIP**

SACHES membership form and information 44

## **SACHES 2009**

Annual Conference 2009 96

## **SARE**

Contents of previous issues of SARE 119  
Notes to contributors IBC

## ■ Editorial

*Southern African Review of Education* (SARE) is one of several education journals in South Africa. Our focus is on broad comparative debate about education and development. We have tried consistently to encourage a comparative rather than a country-specific focus. This issue of SARE opens with two comparative articles followed by four articles relating to history education.

The articles by Bukari and Jita and by Chikoko and Aipinge both have a clear comparative focus, in that they compare activities in two different countries. Bukari and Jita focus on the policy and practice of partnerships in Japanese development aid in South Africa and Ghana. Their comparison casts light on the meaning of partnerships in practice by highlighting similarities and differences between the two countries. Chikoko and Aipinge, by contrast, compare principals' experience of another aid-initiated reform, school clusters, in Zimbabwe and Namibia. Both articles demonstrate the value of comparative research in understanding the dynamics of aid policy in education, not only within the southern African region but also across southern and western Africa. Such work is important in helping to expand the scope of research in southern Africa, as well as understanding of the dynamics of change across the continent.

SARE's comparative focus has always been complemented by a historical lens, but here the work has often continued to be country-specific. This issue of SARE seeks to explore the challenges of history education in South Africa and elsewhere (United Kingdom and Swaziland) and the positive challenges of new history curricula. It also explores the relevance of debates outlined below to the contemporary understanding of the nature and form of the new curriculum.

School history often provided a central focus for the critique of apartheid education in South Africa. Ideological bias in favour of Afrikaner nationalist historiography (indoctrination) or the dominance of teacher-centred pedagogy ('talk and chalk') were prominent topics. Although it was not often obvious to those involved at the time, this reflected key themes in history education internationally in the 1960s and 1970s. The nature and status of the **knowledge** embodied in the curriculum, the selection of topics and materials, the question of 'objectivity' in the classroom, the use of 'textbooks' and the nature of assessment procedures all lay in the background. Equally significant was the question of **pedagogy**. The New History movement in the UK, in keeping with progressive educational philosophy, highlighted the question of how to teach history in order to stimulate learner motivation and engagement. The focus here was on conceptual development through the use of multiple texts and source materials by attempting to immerse the learner in the artifacts of the craft much as physics

students might be prepared in a laboratory. At its extremes the promotion of generic notions of critical thinking came to monopolise the pedagogy. The constructivist mode of promoting dynamic learning environments came to trump the need to convey a systematic body of historical knowledge and research procedures to the learner. The exercise of the pedagogic tool became the purpose of the exercise in its own right. Precisely how these local and international debates about history education came to intersect and influence the development of a new curriculum after 1994 still presents a considerable challenge to researchers. As in the past, so in the present: there is still some kind of assumption that the South African experience, politically and educationally, has somehow been unique or *exceptional* and that this exceptionalism should be reflected in the way in which we teach history in schools.

That lack of systematic understanding of the apartheid experience of school history left a vacuum that remains to haunt history education in South Africa at the present time. Despite all the glow around the launch of the new outcomes-based education curriculum and the Revised National Curriculum Statement two years later (1996-8), many thought that there was a fundamental failure to understand the nature of the project and what was to be reformed. The creators of the new curriculum were driven by an understandable, romantic desire to use history in school to promote nation-building and the 'rainbow nation,' but they lacked an understanding of the dangers of simply conflating school history with a new national project associated with the success of the popular liberation struggle and the political project of the ANC. That implied the teaching of a new master narrative to replace the Afrikaner nationalist historiography of the past rather than an educational project aimed at the promotion of historical forms of analysis and explanation. Although wrapped up in the obscure language of outcomes-based education, constructivist ideas about the nature of school knowledge and general references to notions of progressive pedagogy, the essential nature of history education as a pedagogical practice was significantly eroded. The new curriculum policy has been built on uncertain foundations (arrived at by committee consensus and for the most part excluding historians and educational academics) that are not highly regarded by the majority of experienced history teachers. The overall outcome has been that the status of history as a school subject and as a foundation discipline for the senior certificate examination has declined sharply.

### **Good intentions/unintended outcomes?**

Drawing on Bernstein's work, Carol Bertram argues that the new curriculum is characterised by its sacrifice of substantive disciplinary knowledge (traditional historical forms of knowledge) to procedural knowledge – generic processes for stimulating critical thinking. General goals of critical thinking overwhelm the distinctiveness of historical procedures such as chronology, sequence, explanation and the focus on the explication of historical concepts.

In the OBE curriculum in the Foundation and GET Phases she argues that historical knowledge is just one of many educational objectives to be achieved in the Social Science curriculum. This undercuts the rationale for teaching history as a distinctive discipline in schools. The FET phase retained some disciplinary identity after the review committee report on Curriculum 2005 in 2000 and the unveiling of the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) but it failed to retain a balance between chronology, conceptual organisation and context. She also argues that the new curriculum is in large part adhered to in form rather than in substance by teachers in popular schools – in part because the curriculum is not sufficiently well understood, in part because teachers do not have a significantly deep grasp of the fundamental of the discipline to be able to teach effectively in the manner prescribed by the curriculum, and in part because the materials necessary for teaching in a critical mode are not available.

Robert Guyver provides an international research framework for understanding the issues pointed to above. He notes that the promotion of a national identity through the history curriculum is always fraught with difficulties. The success of the education depends in part on the nature of the ‘nation-building’ and the particular ideological project represented in a particular context. It also depends on what is expected of history teachers in terms of ‘curriculum delivery’ and the degree to which they are expected to exercise independent judgement in carrying out their task. To what extent are they expected to ‘create an open and empowering dialogic space where there is a free flow of ideas that tap into the idea of a universal community of teachers and academics where up-to-date subject knowledge is supported’? What protocols need to be put in place to ensure that the curriculum does not get bogged down in new kinds of exceptionalism – very different in form from the practices of apartheid education, but in the end carrying out similar functions?

Building on a recent doctoral dissertation, Sofie Geschier, like Carol Bertram, is also concerned with exploring the dynamic of the new curriculum with regard to the teaching of history. In relation to the promotion of local history and identity at school, she uses a case study of the teaching of the history of District Six to coloured children in Cape Town in order to engage with the complexities of the pedagogic relationship between teacher, guide (former resident) and students. She is concerned with ‘problematiz[ing] the role and use of primary narratives and their bearers in meeting the demands of the history curriculum for the inclusion of oral testimony in the recovery of silent or lost voices’. She concludes that ‘theoretical ideals for educational goals do not automatically seem to guarantee the desired outcome of democratic change’.

Nsibandé and Modiba examine the implications of history curriculum revision in Swaziland in relation to nation-building and the dilemmas faced by policy-makers who seek to implement an intellectually credible classroom practice drawn from internationally credible criteria in the face of a hegemonic national project which

seems to reduce history in the classroom to an expression of hegemonic politics. The account of teacher practice in the case study examines the tensions between the policy goals and rhetoric associated with the desire to deliver an intellectually credible history education in the classroom and 'the hard realities of the context in which they taught' - these presented 'a set of expectations that were perceived to be potentially dangerous and need(ing) to be avoided.' The imperatives of the political and ideological context in a non-democratic state trumped the need to stimulate a classroom environment which promoted critical thinking and teachers were reluctant to implement goals which were at odds with taken-for-granted political assumptions about national life and ideological context. Although the authors do not draw explicit comparative lessons from the study, the findings have significant relevance to the teaching of history elsewhere, and invite comparative analysis with the reforms in South Africa and elsewhere.

Comparative and historical approaches to education in Southern Africa such as these remain critical to a deeper understanding of the region and the challenges it faces along with the continent as a whole in an era of global financial crisis.

**Linda Chisholm and Peter Kallaway**

# Partnerships for educational development in Africa: Evidence from Japanese professional development programmes for science teachers in Ghana and South Africa

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## Abstract

Following the attention given by the Jomtien Declaration (1990) to the need for partnerships in the promotion of education, developing countries have initiated partnerships with many international donor agencies. The rationale, design and practice of many partnerships still require systematic investigation in the different country-contexts. This paper examines the framework, construction and practice of partnerships, using the Japan International Cooperation Agency's (JICA) educational development partnership programmes in Ghana and South Africa as case studies. The evidence, gathered through interviews with key officials and document analysis, suggests that while partnerships are key, they are often narrowly conceptualized within development projects. The JICA partnerships described in this paper represent a mixture of both stimulating and limiting factors. The paper concludes with a discussion of the implications of the conceptualization of a partnership for the opportunities for and constraints on the development it seeks to achieve.

**Keywords:** Partnerships, educational development, Japanese development cooperation, science teacher professional development

## Introduction and background

In the two decades following the 1990 World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, there has been renewed interest among donor agencies and many developing countries in educational development partnerships. The World Bank, for example, recognized the growing importance of partnerships in its development strategies when

Bukari, Z and Jita, L. (2009) Partnerships for educational development in Africa: Evidence from Japanese professional development programmes for science teachers in Ghana and South Africa. *Southern African Review of Education*, 15(1): 7-24.

it argued that the challenge of development is far too big for any single institution and too complex to be left to only one perspective (World Bank 2000). The UK's Department for International Development (DfID) took a similar approach in its White Paper *Eliminating World Poverty*, where it emphasized a shift to developing partnerships with governments of developing countries, rather than using the more conventional donor language that understood these governments merely as 'recipients' of aid: 'Where we have confidence ... in partner governments, we will support sector-wide programmes and the economy as a whole' (DfID 1997: 38). The same can be said of USAID and its numerous educational programmes across the African continent (Tabulawa 2003; Anzar et al. 2004).

Japan's policy for overseas development assistance (ODA) has pursued development partnerships with a greater emphasis on local ownership (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan 1997; JICA 2005: 2). This shift on the part of the Japanese is captured by the principle in the oath of service of the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA, the implementation agency for Japan's ODA programmes): 'With passion and pride ... we will work as partners to those in need of assistance, ... promoting peace and sustainable development' (JICA 2005: 2). The shift in emphasis by JICA perhaps emanates from Japan's experience as a non-Western nation that was once a recipient of aid and achieved development through, in part at least, improved education. King and McGrath (2004) make this point in their illustration of how this role of donor-cum-recipient has continued to be the rationale for Japan's insistence on following its own bilateral form of development assistance.

Many developing countries, convinced of the important role of educational improvement in achieving sustainable development, as captured in JICA's oath of service, but unable to fund it themselves, have resorted to seeking assistance from external agencies (Samoff 1999). The search for these new sources of revenue and new efficiencies in education has forced governments to turn to partnerships with international donor agencies (Chapman 2001). The formation of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) gave fresh impetus to these partnerships for development initiatives on that continent.

However, despite this renewed enthusiasm for partnerships, international assistance agencies have been repeatedly criticized for the limited impact and effectiveness of their development assistance (US News and World Report 1999; World Bank 2000). Many studies tend to report on the lack of effectiveness (ADEA 1999; OED 2005) and lack of sustainability (Harvey and Peacock 2001; Nocon 2004; Powell 2001) of development assistance partnerships, without, however, focusing on the partnership process itself as a unit of analysis. Assessing partnerships as effective or not often has very little to say about how the processes that brought about such consequences function in the different contexts, and is not in itself interesting (Plummer 2002). What stakeholders and implementers want to know about is the process that led to the observed consequences of failure or success, their sustainability or lack thereof, and

the associated opportunities for and/or constraints on their partnership efforts (Plummer 2002).

This paper starts from the premise that researchers should enquire not only about what development assistance partnerships have accomplished, but how they function and what makes them function in the ways they do. That is, it is important to study how donor agencies and countries frame and practise their partnerships. In one sense, the analysis by King and McGrath (2004) begins this task, at a rather global level, by examining the knowledge base that informs the various development agencies and their programmes. This study continues the analysis by examining how JICA and its partners negotiate the actual practice of such partnerships. Even more important, from a research perspective, should be the study of such partnerships to explore the relationship between the development and practice of partnerships on the one hand and the consequences they precipitate on the other.

The aim here is therefore not to join those impact assessment scholars who produce ever more complex data on how effective or ineffective partnerships are in achieving their set goals. Instead, the analysis focuses on the development (i.e. the construction, framework and practice) and consequences (opportunities and constraints) of such educational development partnerships in Africa. Two JICA-funded science teacher development programmes, in Ghana and South Africa (the Science, Technology and Mathematics [STM] project in Ghana and the Mpumalanga Secondary Science Initiative [MSSI] project in South Africa), are used as the basis of the analysis. First the conceptual framework of the analysis is outlined; then the case studies of two JICA-funded development projects are presented in order to understand the framework and practice of the projects; and the article concludes with a discussion of the implications of the conceptualization of a partnership for the opportunities and constraints related to the development it seeks to achieve.

## **Conceptual framework**

### **Review of educational development partnerships in Africa**

While partnerships for educational development in Africa are not new, they vary in context, scale and character. The institutional and policy frameworks guiding them are also still evolving (Oyelaran-Oyeyinka 2005). The rationale for partnerships has often been discussed in terms of the complementarity of different organizational assets, pluralism in funding, institutional synergy and comparative advantage (Hall et al. 1999). However, most international partnerships in education are described as minimally effective (ADEA 1999; World Bank 2000). Furthermore, the few that are moderately effective face the challenge of sustainability (Powell 2001). These observed consequences of partnerships have been attributed to such factors as asymmetrical power relations, limited local ownership with no equivalent transfer of power (Furlong et al. 1996), unequal partners in the partnership arrangements (Oyelaran-Oyeyinka

2005) and inclusion and exclusion, dominance and subordination (Tett, Crowther and O'Hara 2003). Yet educational development partnerships in developed countries such as the USA are reported to be highly successful (Linn et al. 1999). This suggests the need for research on the differing nature of such partnerships in different contexts.

The range of conceptualizations of partnerships is indeed diverse, complex and at times ambiguous. Nevertheless, by examining these differing conceptualizations and their associated purposes and practices, it has been possible to distinguish a number of models of international partnership that currently coexist within and between developing countries.

*Model 1:* This conceptualization of an international partnership is characterized by donors bearing responsibility solely for providing funds, with the recipient government taking responsibility for administration and organization, and ensuring the smooth implementation of the programme. The recipient country works with its local facilitators, who come in as experts or consultants with the interest of providing paid services. Most donors today still emphasise the value of this traditional model, since it actively promotes national 'ownership' of training and reform policies (ILO 2002).

*Model 2:* The conceptualization of this type of partnership is similar to Model 1, except that it includes technical expertise through the participation of foreign expatriates. Here funds and expatriate experts are brought in to facilitate the training of locals. Inter-country training assistance for teachers has always relied on two categories of resource persons: local trainers, who are often part of the government, and expatriate training experts. The expatriates are supposed to bring a wealth of experience to local training programmes, despite the fact that they frequently lack knowledge of local culture and are expensive.

*Model 3:* This conceptualization of a partnership is characterized by collaboration beyond governments and donor agencies to civil society. International cooperation, traditionally between donor agencies and recipient governments, is increasingly changing in scope, involving governments, social partners, and private and public institutions (ILO 2002). A major drawback, however, is the diversity of interests involved (Plummer 2002: 120). It is this Model 3 that provides the context for the research and discussion in this paper.

### **A new conceptualization of partnerships**

The term partnership is used in different ways in different contexts, generally implying some form of collaboration involving international and local parties, the public and private sectors, and the formal and informal sectors (Plummer 2002: 6). Genuine participation means joint ownership and mutual rights and obligations, and implies contractual relationships with procedures for redress in case of default (Maxwell and Riddell 1998). Similarly, Francey (1997) describes partnerships in

terms of ‘deciding together’ and ‘acting together’. This view extends the conceptualization of partnership beyond mere collaboration to a process dimension. The ‘what’ and ‘how’ of the decision-making processes are, however, still unclear. Odora Hoppers (2001) and Edens, Shirley and Toner (2001) argue that partnerships should work diligently at fostering deep and ongoing conversations about issues, conflicts and differences that culminate in mutually satisfying resolutions. This is what Mkandawire (1996) refers to as ‘genuine partnership’ that is developed through pure dialogue and contrasts with what Odora Hoppers (2001) refers to as ‘surface partnership’, where partnerships have had more to do with affirming the power of one group over others. Dialogue, according to Freire (1972), is an existential necessity in partnerships and cannot be an act of arrogance or dominance.

In addition to dialogue, Dorado and Giles (2004) assert that partnerships should be grounded in a network of authentic, democratic and reciprocal relationships defined in terms of respect and value for all partners. Combining the concepts of ‘surface partnership’ and ‘genuine partnership’ with their accompanying features as proposed by Mkandawire (1996) and Odora Hoppers (2001) produces a useful framework for analysing the JICA partnerships under study in terms of their processes and outcomes. It allows one to examine the institutional and policy contexts governing the partnership processes, to understand the dynamics of the relationship between partners and to analyse the various stakeholder participants’ conceptualization of the partnership.

**Conceptual framework: Key features of surface and genuine partnerships (Mkandawire 1996; Odora Hoppers 2001)**

Characteristic	Surface partnership	Genuine partnership
<i>Governance</i>	Asymmetrical power relations (Dominance)	Symmetrical power relations (No dominance)
<i>Negotiation</i>	Limited dialogue	Authentic dialogue
<i>Relationship</i>	Superiority	Reciprocity

The goal of the present study was not to establish truth claims about educational development assistance partnerships the world over, but to provide a better understanding of and insight into the mechanisms of partnership design and practice, and the associated consequences of the cases under study in Africa.

## Methodology

The study employs a qualitative approach (Lancy 1993), using two JICA-funded projects – the Science, Technology and Mathematics (STM) project in Ghana and the Mpumalanga Secondary Science Initiative (MSSI) project in South Africa – as case studies. The two cases were chosen primarily because of the researchers’ familiarity with both projects, having both worked on them. Their relationship with the projects

provided an opportunity of easy access to appropriate documents and personnel in each of the two countries. The question of accessibility has been identified as one of the major constraints facing researchers in the developing world (Powell 2001). Furthermore, this familiarity made it possible to compare, albeit minimally, the lessons derived from the implementation experiences in both countries. They were, however, mindful of the added burden resulting from such a close relationship during the data collection and analysis.

The study used document analysis, interviews and observations as the main data collection strategies. Document analysis was chosen as a method because of its worth in providing relevant legitimate data from a variety of sources (Creswell 2003). Documents included policy documents, reports of evaluation studies, newsletters, and the reports and minutes of stakeholders' meetings.

The interviews involved 12 key administrative officers: two participants purposefully selected from each partner of the two projects in both countries. Interview sessions lasted between 45 and 60 minutes, with mostly semi-structured and open-ended questions being used. This allowed for a greater degree of individual expression and more interaction between the interviewer and the interviewees, permitting immediate clarification, probes and prompts to ensure an in-depth expression of ideas and thoughts by participants (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2002). For the purpose of validation and to ensure that no aspects of the views or opinions of participants were lost, the interview sessions were recorded on audiotapes with the consent of the participants. Observations were used as a complementary data collection technique: the researchers used the natural setting to observe some stakeholders' meetings, provincial training workshops, conference meetings and cluster activities within the partnership activities.

Data analysis began in the field with a peer review involving two researchers as a validation strategy. The study used inductive data analysis (drawing inferences from particular instances) to interpret the data collected case by case. Audio data were first transcribed from recorded tapes into text, organized by coding and clustering (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2002) and subsequently categorized into themes corresponding to the research questions: the policy/organizational framework of the partnership (goal and objectives, leadership structure, roles of partners, approaches and components); the construction and practices of the partnerships (decision-making process, the institutional culture, interpersonal relationships, communication, and individual perceptions and expectations); and the resultant outcomes of the partnerships (opportunities and constraints generated).

## **Findings**

### **Case One: The Mpumalanga Secondary Science Initiative project in SA**

Following a request by the South African government to JICA, the Mpumalanga

Secondary Science Initiative (MSSI) was conceived in 1999 as a tripartite partnership involving the Mpumalanga Department of Education (MDE), JICA and the Joint Centre for Science, Mathematics and Technology Education (JCSMTE) of the University of Pretoria (UP). The main objective of the partnership was to establish and maintain a province-wide system for the in-service development (INSET) of mathematics and science teachers in order to improve the quality of teaching and learning of secondary mathematics and science in schools (MDE 1999: 2).

The construction phase of the partnership was characterized by a number of feasibility studies conducted by visiting teams of Japanese experts from Hiroshima University and the Naruto University of Education (MDE 1999: 2). The studies were followed by a series of joint meetings and deliberations involving all three partners. The construction was participatory in nature, involving personnel from UP, policy-makers and top management from the MDE, experts from JICA and Japanese universities, and representatives from teacher unions. Although initiated by the Japanese, the construction process of MSSI appears to have been shaped by substantial stakeholder participation and deliberation based on the principle of dialogue. The outcome of this process was the formulation of the project framework, including the project design matrix, which contained the objectives, strategies and approaches, inputs and outputs, as well as indicators of success (MDE 1999: 2). Some scholars have cautioned, however, that no matter how well intended and constructed a partnership is, its practice can undermine its delivery of mutual benefits to all actors (Harkavy 1998). The practices of partners are actually shaped by their understanding and conceptualization of the partnership they are entering into: the conceptualizations of the partnership among the various stakeholder participants in the project were therefore explored.

While JICA, in its 'oath of service', states that 'we will work as partners to those in need of assistance' (JICA 2005: 2), it was none the less difficult to establish what JICA's conception of the term 'partnership' is. In view of this lack of clarity in the documents, the interviews with the various stakeholders included the question, 'What is your conception of partnership in the MSSI project?' A Japanese expert who was involved in the project from inception conveyed the following sense of the partnership:

I can tell you that it is an agreement among entities, each of which brings resources to the project. That is why we call them partners. If they come as consultants, then they are not partners, they are only technical service providers.

Asked the same question, a senior official of the MDE responded as follows:

Partnership means bringing together and sharing our resources, according to our strength. For example, financially, JICA contributes more; technically, experts from Japanese universities and UP provide more; but in terms of teachers, offices and even administrative roles, MDE does more.

These statements prioritize the 'bringing of resources' as the central element in the

MSSI partnership conception. The need for and role of resources in education development is indeed important, considering developing countries' lack of adequate resources (Samoff 1999). However, this partnership conception, which is peculiar not only to MSSI, appears limited in scope in view of the argument that partnership engagements need to go beyond the resource agenda to issues of interactive processes among partners, such as mutual respect, power relations and dialogue to promote a common interest (Dorado and Giles 2004).

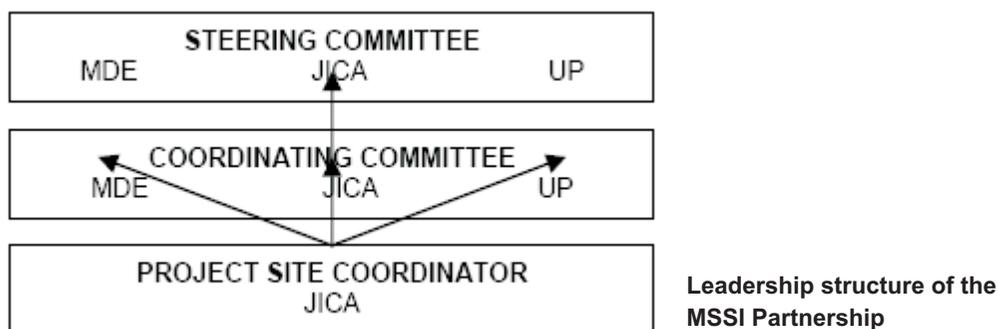
With regard to implementation, the partnership functioned with the MDE as the owner of the project, with technical support from JICA and UP provided through the short-term visits of experts from Hiroshima University, the Naruto University of Education and the University of Pretoria. At the implementation stage, three key principles shaped the project's strategies, viz. joint governance and coordination; local ownership and division of labour; and continuous monitoring and evaluation. The leadership structure was made up of a steering committee, a coordinating committee and a site coordinator, as illustrated in the accompanying figure.

A senior official in the MDE expressed the following view on the leadership structure:

It was good because the leadership included the three partners and people at all levels – top leaders like the MEC and the Directors of FET and GET – and it promoted local ownership because the chairperson of the steering committee was from the MDE.

The promotion of local ownership was confirmed by observations of stakeholder meetings, where the MDE official usually chaired deliberations leading to the shaping of decisions that were unanimously endorsed. While the participation of all three partners and the chairing of the steering committee by an MDE official may be enough to confirm local ownership of the partnership, a UP expert on the MSSI had a different view:

In meetings, for example, someone would say, 'You can't say you know Mpumalanga more than me! How many times do you visit? I have been here for a long time, so don't say you know more than me!' For me it was a matter of power and of who owns the schools.



For this expert, the partnership was made up of unequal partners and therefore could not be described as genuine. The meaning and practice of partnership within the leadership structures of the project were explored further. An MDE official on the MSSSI explained:

The principle of local ownership is encouraging, but its real functioning was limited more to responsibilities than to power. To the best of my knowledge, we could not take any decision without consulting them [JICA] for their approval, particularly on funds. Consultation is good, but why should one become more controlling in some aspect, and when it comes to responsibilities we [MDE] are blamed?

While there may have been problems with regard to asymmetrical power relations, the MSSSI partnership was not consumed by such problems of power. Dialogue among the partners seemed to play a mediatory role and made the partnership more flexible than might otherwise have been the case. Here is how one participant characterized the role of dialogue in the partnership:

The flexibility helped a lot – we were able to achieve our goals because all of us met to discuss issues and make serious changes if a point was well defended and supported. This made MSSSI different from other projects we have experienced in the province.

Our observations and interviews suggest that, unlike many other donor agencies, the Japanese partnership in this case strove to promote more local ownership through its leadership structures and the participatory approach to dialogue. These features made the partnership more flexible and seemed to contribute to its effectiveness.

During the six-year (1999-2006) period of MSSSI, the project evolved through two sequential stages, Phase I (1999-2002) and Phase II (2003-2006) (MDE 2006: 7-8). The process of designing the second phase was based on lessons from the first phase that emerged during the discussions and dialogue, resulting in a rather different Phase II than had originally been planned. A major innovation following the transition between Phases I and II was the adoption of cluster- or network-based training of teachers, rather than the cascade model that had been used previously.

Six years is a long time in the life of a development project, and some personnel changes are bound to happen. These changes in personnel representing the different partners in the MSSSI had some drawbacks, as expressed by a Japanese expert:

Hold on, I am not saying the whole project failed – Phase I was OK. But in Phase II we envisaged establishing a province-wide INSET system, which is far from us. A major unfortunate drawback was the restructuring during the transition to Phase II: new people who did not understand the philosophy of the partnership came in and that created some problems.

The main issue with the restructuring was that it brought to the fore some of the potential cracks around the initial consensus about the conceptualization of the partnership as ‘each bringing their own resources’. New questions were raised, and old

questions resurfaced, which disturbed the initial consensus established with earlier groups of participants. In addition to the challenge of operationalizing the power structures, some issues around interpersonal and inter-cultural relations, mainly between the Japanese and the South Africans, also challenged the MSSSI partnership.

In the final analysis, the success or otherwise of the partnership will be viewed differently, depending on the understanding of the partnership by each stakeholder group. The following comments by a Japanese expert illustrate the point:

We wanted to build a province-wide INSET system that is sustainable. Honestly, we are far from establishing a system that is sustainable. But we did our best, even though it didn't work as planned.

While he viewed the partnership as less than successful in failing to establish a sustainable 'province-wide INSET system', a senior MDE official on the MSSSI project viewed it as a resounding success:

Teachers have learnt a lot of things; they are excited; teachers have gone to Japan and are trained; and there is a cluster system working. It has now even been extended to other subject areas not limited to only science and mathematics. It was a success.

Each person's notion of success obviously depends on their conceptualization of the partnership. Regarding the achievement of goals, the MSSSI final evaluation report (MDE 2006: 76) concluded that 'the project made significant advancement in establishing a province-wide system of INSET for science and mathematics teachers. However, the building process is incomplete and its sustainability is unlikely, which fall short of the envisaged goal.' Of the many contributions mentioned during the interviews and also captured in the MSSSI final evaluation report (MDE 2006), the following stood out as significant: (1) changing teachers' classroom practices, particularly in the use of materials; (2) strengthening teacher development through long and short-term training; (3) creating the opportunity for active learning and exchange of knowledge and skills among partners through clusters; (4) equipping and revitalizing active utilization of teachers' centres; and (5) bridging the gap between educators and education departments on one hand and higher education institutions on the other.

### **Case Two: The Science, Technology and Mathematics project in Ghana**

The Science, Technology and Mathematics (STM) project operated from 2000 to 2005 under a bilateral partnership arrangement between the governments of Japan and Ghana, through JICA and GES/TED (Ghana Education Service/Teacher Education Division) respectively. The STM project document (STM 1999: 1) and the STM mid-term review report (STM 2002: 4) indicate that the main objective of the project was 'to improve the capacity (content and pedagogical knowledge) of science and mathematics teachers at the primary and junior secondary school levels in project areas'.

Similarly to the MSSSI in South Africa, the STM project was constructed jointly through discussions and dialogue between the two partners, JICA and the GES/TED, in consultation with other stakeholders such as the Ghana National Association of Teachers and the University of Cape Coast (UCC). The STM administrative coordinator described the construction process as follows:

A baseline survey was conducted first, to understand the local conditions, followed by the Project Cycle Management workshop, which had two main stages: first, identification and analysis of the problem, and, second, the objective analysis. We used a participatory approach to involve a wide range of stakeholders, for example the University of Cape Coast and teacher unions, who helped us to construct a workable project framework.

Unlike in the MSSSI, the baseline research and needs analysis were conducted jointly by a team of Japanese consultants and local participants from Ghana. Even at this early stage of the project, dialogue seems to have been a key feature. In the above quote, the administrative coordinator describes what has become standard procedure in all JICA-funded partnership programmes in Africa and elsewhere. They all begin with Japanese experts' research and input, sometimes conducted with local partners, to form the basis for discussions with local counterparts. In the case of the STM, this standard procedure is illustrated by a comment from the National Project Coordinator:

The team was made up of Japanese experts and Ghanaian counterparts, so we all brought our expertise while learning from one another. We learnt a lot from the Japanese experts, we worked together, and no one felt more important than the other.

While the STM was a bilateral partnership arrangement between JICA and GES/TED, the conceptions of the partnership were fairly similar to the MSSSI in South Africa in that the 'transfer of expertise' and 'contribution of resources' were key features. Once again, however, the idea of a partnership that goes beyond 'bringing resources together' or 'knowledge and skills transfer' into the interactive processes, such as mutual respect, power relations and the nature of dialogue among partners, seems to have been minimal within the STM partnership. Nonetheless, the idea of learning together, as indicated above, appears to have potential as a basis for genuine partnership-building. The notions of 'learning together' and 'dialogue' may be useful ingredients for the development of a genuine partnership in the long run.

Similarly to the MSSSI, the STM's main implementation strategies included joint governance and coordination through committee meetings, division of labour in the allocation of responsibilities, and continuous monitoring and evaluation. The STM adopted the cluster approach to training from the beginning and used the Japanese system of lesson study for training. In general, the leadership structures of STM functioned much like those of the MSSSI, with representation from all the major stakeholders in the project, as described by the STM national coordinator:

Within the project we had the Joint Coordinating Committee as the highest decision-making body, and the Working Committee, which looked at the implementation process. We also had a Japanese chief advisor and a national project coordinator who coordinated the day-to-day running of the project. The governing structure was good because all partners were represented equally.

As discussed earlier, equal representation of all the major stakeholders in the structures and committees does not on its own guarantee full participation and partnership. What is more critical for our analysis is what happened in those committees and structures. Discussing this issue with the STM science facilitator gave an idea of how the structures operated in practice:

One good thing about the leadership structure was that every partner formed part of the decision-making body of the project. Besides, at meetings issues were raised and discussed freely through dialogue among partners ... It was participatory in nature, such that UCC and teacher unions were invited to some meetings, which was very good.

As in the MSSSI, the mediatory role of dialogue within the STM partnership, highlighted by this characterization, made the project construction processes more flexible and accommodating. According to one STM district science coordinator, dialogue and flexibility were key factors during the construction and implementation stages:

If all projects were flexible like STM, no project would fail totally ..., because we modified things as the project was ongoing; no one dominated the other ...; everything was done through dialogue, discussion and consultation with stakeholders. That's the beautiful part of the project. Our operation was flexible, not rigid. We did not end the way we started: after the mid-term review, the project's activities were changed to ensure that the project's goals were achieved and sustained.

However, as was the case in the MSSSI, some sceptics raised questions about how meaningful the dialogue was in the context of apparently asymmetrical power relations. The STM science facilitator captured this view as follows:

Discussions and listening must go hand in hand ... Why should flexibility be only applicable to planning activities and not to finance? You see, we discuss a lot and we all plan, but if you plan without knowing how much you are planning, only to submit and it is then reduced ..., then it's constraining. But ... a rich man and poor man together can improve the poor man's life ... Now we have benefited, it is the best for us.

In both projects, JICA's financial commitments were not disclosed upfront, but were negotiated and discussed during the implementation stages, to the dissatisfaction of some local participants, who wanted to know such details prior to their planning and submission of proposals. In affirmation of this claim, the STM administrative coordinator explained the motive behind this approach of JICA's as follows:

For the reason of avoiding some complaints and to promote sustainability some financial aspects were not made known. We can't declare everything, but we tried to share the financial information. For example, at the district level we

authorized them to draw up an action plan with a budget for us to look at together, and then funds were provided. That should not be a problem, but people have their personal interest.

This limited financial transparency on JICA's part was obviously intended to reduce waste, greed and corruption in their distribution of aid. There were, however, different views on whether it constrained the partnerships in any way. Some in the partnership saw it as a way of promoting sustainability, while others viewed it as a limiting factor in their planning and execution of project activities. Local partners might in this sense need to learn to rise above their personal interests and pursue partnerships more genuinely, with no concealed agendas. JICA on the other hand needs to learn to be more transparent with respect to funds given the dissatisfaction of local partners and if possible devise more satisfactory strategies for sustainability.

Cultural and personality differences of course frequently have to be managed as part of development partnerships. Further exploring the interactive processes among the partners in the STM revealed some of the challenges in this regard:

We cannot say we had it all perfect. It was personal – Japan and Ghana have different ways of working and sometimes people have their own time for doing certain things. We Ghanaians want to relax in a way, but the Japanese want to work. It is basically an issue of cultural difference.

Similarly, another partner traced some of the minor conflicts in the partnership to linguistic differences:

Communication was mainly an issue of language. If you don't actually understand the language very well, sometimes you will become suspicious of what someone is saying. Sometimes, the Japanese resorted to the Japanese language and the Ghanaians to the Ghanaian language – then each group became suspicious of the other. So language was one of the big problems among us.

While these linguistic and cultural differences could potentially influence a partnership negatively, a Japanese adviser was nevertheless optimistic in her reflection on these interpersonal differences within the STM project:

Sometimes I had a fight with Ghanaian counterparts. However, before they left or when they arrived the next morning, they would shake hands with me and resolve the misunderstandings. So I really learnt from my relationship with them. I think Ghanaians sometimes complain about things, but they accept discussions and don't like keeping quarrels.

Phase I of the STM partnership came to an end in March 2005, with contributions to mathematics and science teacher development in Ghana similar to those in South Africa. Remarkably, the main features that enhanced the achievement of these contributions in both cases were local ownership, a participatory approach and, above all, dialogue, all of which highlighted flexibility and allowed reconstruction of the project design as the partnership evolved. However, a major threat to long-term success in Ghana is the high attrition rate of STM-trained teachers. The final evalu-

ation report (STM 2005) indicated, for example, that 11,7% (167 out of 1430) of the STM-trained teachers left the Tamale Municipality between 2002 and 2005. An STM science facilitator indicated that financial constraints were a challenge to sustainability:

Sustainability of the good practices is doubtful. The challenge of sustainability in terms of funding support from the districts has remained a big challenge. The project depends so much on the Japanese government financially.

The heavy financial dependency or over-reliance of the project on the Japanese Government appears to be a major barrier to the sustainability of the project for the Ghana Government.

### **Discussion and conclusion**

What opportunities and constraints resulted from the JICA-funded educational development partnership projects in Ghana and South Africa? It is worth noting that none of the three partnership models outlined earlier directly matches either of the partnership projects in this study. Instead, a combination of models appears to coexist. The importance of this study therefore lies in part in its attempt to expand the conceptualization of the models discussed earlier and in its problematization of the descriptions and analyses of development projects in Africa and other developing contexts. The projects analysed in this study constitute two of seven JICA-funded primary and secondary science and mathematics education programmes in Africa.

To understand the dynamics of the partnerships just described, let us return to Plummer (2002: 44), who identifies three stages in a partnership process: strategic planning, partnership development, and partnership implementation through shared commitment. The strategic planning stage entails problem identification, defining of objectives, context and stakeholder analysis, and exploration of the partnership alternative (Plummer 2002: 44-45). The strategic planning process was observable in the partnership projects studied, as reflected by the baseline surveys followed by deliberations among the partners. Although these planning processes were collaborative and involved all partners, power relations within the decision-making structures remained unsatisfactory and were sometimes contested. The data suggests that within these constrained relations of power, progress was made largely as a result of the high degree of dialogue within the partnership and the flexibility of the partners in decision-making. Many donor agencies praise the virtues of partnership arrangements but practise the contrary. For instance, OECD/DAC documents continue to emphasize the principle of local ownership in country development strategies, yet the moneyed partners remain conscious of their power, making the authenticity of partnership questionable (Odora Hoppers 2001). Hence, whether the concept of local ownership adequately corresponds to an equivalent transfer of power remains an open question (Linn et al. 1999). These virtues can emerge only from an open dialogue between local authorities and their external partners about their shared objectives and respective contributions to the common enterprise (King 1999: 2). Unlike the case

with some other donor agencies, the JICA partnerships made a deliberate effort to pursue shared goals through continuous deliberations and consultation both at the upper leadership level through steering committee meetings and at the frontline leadership level through the joint committee meetings. This provided the partnerships with a leadership structure that allowed dialogue and negotiation to assume a position that Brinkerhoff (2002) calls the mediator and generator of mutuality.

The dialogical frameworks of both the MSSSI and the STM projects are commendable. The occasionally unequal power relations and interpersonal challenges associated with these two partnership projects illustrate how difficult it is to establish real partnerships for educational development. This is even more true in cases where an imbalance in the provision of funds skews the exercise of control and power in the partnership. This difficulty surfaced in both these projects, with partners asserting that the idea of local ownership was exciting but it was sometimes constrained by asymmetrical power relations. Our analysis therefore confirms the view that genuine partnership involves far more than mere contribution of assets in the partnership arrangement: issues of mutual respect and symmetrical power relations may be essential (Odora Hoppers 2001; Chapman 2001). Interestingly, though, the analysis also suggests that some partners appear content to have less control for the sake of the benefits of the project. This challenges the common view of unequal power relations as an unacceptable practice in partnership (Oyelaran-Oyeyinka 2005; Tett, Crowther and O'Hara 2003; Odora Hoppers 2001). Indeed, harmony can exist where all partners clearly perceive benefits and operate in mutual trust, which does not necessarily require partners to have equal authority or inputs (Bray 1999). This is a subject that requires further research and analysis.

This study also showed that most challenges encountered in the partnerships were effectively addressed through dialogue and reciprocal respect. Partnerships should therefore be grounded in a network of authentic, democratic and reciprocal relationships in terms of respect and value for all partners (Dorado and Giles 2004). Although in practice things are rather more complex, if carefully pursued partnerships can be made to work for the development of education in Africa and elsewhere. Indeed, our analysis suggests that partnerships are more demanding than one would anticipate and require close attention to both the interactions and the processes involved. It is important, as Bray (1999), suggests that partnerships should be viewed as a relationship between individuals and institutions rather than in terms of the resources that constitute one of the poles of the relationship. An important inference drawn from the two case studies is that the initial construction of a partnership becomes less significant if actors engage practically in genuine partnership, in that dialogue may lead to flexibility and reconstruction as the partnership evolves. A major structural factor identified as a drawback to sustainability in both JICA projects, however, is (over)dependence on foreign resources, expertise and institutional capacity in running the projects. Nonetheless, in the light of these case studies, the

emphasis on partnerships in the 1990 World Declaration is evidently wise.

It seems that the real lessons can come only from a careful analysis of each negotiated partnership project. The major implication highlighted in this paper is not only that partnerships founded in solidarity with the recipients of development assistance stand the most chance of success, but the fact that, no matter how well intended and designed a partnership arrangement is, its implementation can be adversely affected by practices at the institutional and individual levels. As Harkavy (1998: 33) observed about community partnerships, 'To call for radical reform of partnerships is easy to do, but the hard thing to do is to figure out how to do it. The hardest thing of all, of course, is to actually get it done.'

The characterization of the implementation processes of the partnerships described in this paper yields mixed outcomes of stimulating and limiting factors. This suggests that a crucial responsibility of collaborators is to deliberately devise mechanisms that will maximize the former and minimize the latter. Policy-makers, donor agencies and researchers are challenged constantly to rethink their conceptualization of partnerships and the policy and institutional contexts within which such partnerships can thrive. This paper has highlighted the need to pay closer attention to the interactions and processes of partnerships, rather than just to their outcomes.

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# The school cluster system as an educational reform: Evidence from Namibia and Zimbabwe

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## Abstract

School clusters have become an international phenomenon, particularly in the developing world, as countries seek ways of addressing the many educational challenges that confront them. However, how those tasked to implement this reform experience and respond to it remains under-researched. There also seems to be a dearth of comparative studies in this area in the Southern African region. This paper reports on two studies, one conducted in Namibia and the other in Zimbabwe, on principals' experiences of the implementation of the school cluster system. Data was collected through interviews and document analyses. Findings show that the cluster system is an ideal grassroots structure consistent with the widely called-for notion of participatory decision-making, but its sustainability is questionable. The paper concludes that in order for reforms to succeed, education systems must complement restructuring with re-culturing.

## Introduction and background

Drawing from two studies on school clusters in Namibia and Zimbabwe (Aiping 2007; Chikoko 2006 respectively), this paper reports and draws implications on two issues: school principals' experiences of the implementation of this reform and factors that enable and/or inhibit its implementation. The literature suggests that while there are recorded studies on school clusters from individual countries in the Southern African region (see for example Dittmar, Mendelsohn and Ward 2002; Chikoko 2006; Aiping 2007), there is a dearth of comparative studies in this regard, particularly on the experiences of those tasked to implement this reform. Such comparative studies are necessary as countries seek to consolidate regional blocks with a view to sharing resources and learning from one another. This paper seeks to contribute a comparative voice to research on school clustering as an educational reform.

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In this article, the term 'principal' is used to refer to a school head. Bray (1987: 7) defines a school cluster as 'a grouping of schools for administrative and educational purposes'. Dittmar, Mendelsohn and Ward (2002) define it as a group of schools that are geographically as close and accessible to each other as possible, serving various purposes such as developing management and teaching practices. In concurrence with the above definitions, the Media in Education Trust (2004) sees a school cluster as an organisational tool comprising schools that are grouped together for the purpose of service delivery. Consistent with the conceptions cited above, in both Namibia and Zimbabwe a school cluster is a group of five to seven schools in the same locality that have agreed to share resources in order to improve the quality and relevance of the education in the member institutions (Mavesera et al. 2000; Mendelsohn and Ward 2001).

School clustering has become an internationally acclaimed educational reform, particularly in the developing world (Bray 1987), as education systems attempt to address the many pressures they face. On the one hand, they suffer severe financial stringency, partly as a result of the poor performance of their economies and partly (arguably) because of poor governance. On the other, they have to satisfy rising educational demand and a rising concern for improved quality of education (Thompson 1981; Bray 1987; Bush and Middlewood 2005). The Namibian and Zimbabwean education systems are currently grappling with such concerns. As an example, Reynolds (1990) rightly argues that the rapid expansion of the Zimbabwean education system since 1980 has given rise to grave concern about falling pass rates and to questions of economic efficiency.

After independence in 1980, Zimbabwe embarked on a massive expansion of its education system with the express purpose of eliminating colonial inequalities. However, in its second decade of independence, against the backdrop of an education system of deteriorating quality (Reynolds 1990) and dwindling resources, there was a need for reform. Informed by international trends such as the agreement at the 1990 World Conference on Education for All in Thailand to develop action plans to improve the capacity and performance of schools (The Better Schools Programme in Zimbabwe 1995) and assisted by donor funding, the Zimbabwean government launched a capacity-building strategy: The Better Schools Programme in Zimbabwe (BSPZ) in 1993. The programme aims at achieving continuous professional growth for teachers, principals and parent school governors.

A management structure (the cluster system) funded by the Netherlands government, comprising national, provincial, district and cluster coordinating committees, was created to run the business of the BSPZ. Thus the school cluster became the vehicle through which the BSPZ would attempt to achieve its goals.

At the end of the donor period, the government was unable to continue funding the programme, resulting in the national and provincial structures disbanding. Today,

the programme is run through a self-funded school cluster system, overseen by an education officer at the district level.

A cluster is run by a cluster coordinating committee of elected members, comprising two school principals (from among the cluster member schools), a resource teacher (responsible for coordinating cluster resources and staff development activities), one teacher per school, one head of department per school, one 'early childhood education and care (ECEC) supervisor, the area councillor, one School Development Committee (SDC) (a school governing body at each school) representative and two coopted influential members of the community (The Better Schools Programme in Zimbabwe 2000:18).

At the time of the study, the economic meltdown in Zimbabwe, characterised by constantly rising inflation and shortages of basic commodities as well as a high brain drain, was taking place. Its negative impact on education cannot be over-emphasised. However, formal education is highly valued in the country and so despite the hardships most parents continued to make sacrifices for their children's education.

Similarly, after its independence in 1990 Namibia embarked on major changes to improve the quality of education delivery. Educational reform and development have been guided by the four overarching goals of access, equity, quality and democracy (Angula, in Zeichmer and Dahlström 2001).

The society-wide demand for better quality education prompted a need for an overall school improvement programme with regard to school management and the curriculum. Angula (in Taylor 2005: 15), minister of the former Ministry of Education, Culture, Youth and Sport (MECYS), appealed to the Namibian nation 'to commit itself to the improvement of education through change, reform and renewal', a process meant to be collaborative, interactive and a partnership between government and all social forces. The school cluster system (SCS) was developed within this context. It was initiated to improve access and throughput as well as overall school management, especially by enhancing communication between schools, circuit and regional offices (Mendelsohn and Ward 2001). In their review of the SCS in Namibia, Mendelsohn and Ward (2001) outline factors that necessitate the development and introduction of SCS as the low level of management and support given to schools, a great need for teacher support, an obvious need for greater participation by all stakeholders in making and implementing decisions, and the isolated working conditions at most schools.

In each cluster one school that is central and easily accessible, has relatively adequate facilities and is situated at a development centre with suitable social and commercial services is selected as a cluster centre. A strong and committed principal with a vision that can extend beyond their school to the needs of all schools and the community in the cluster is appointed to serve as Cluster Centre Principal (CCP).

The SCS was first piloted in the Rundu region. It was implemented with the support of the German-based organisation Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit's (GTZ)

Basic Education Project (BEP) (Mendelsohn and Ward 2001). The success of the SCS in Rundu led three other education regions to request support from the BEP to develop their own clusters (Mendelsohn and Ward 2001; Ward, Mendelsohn and Tjirare 2001). By 2002 the SCS was operational in all 13 regions of the country.

The SCS was introduced at the time the government was implementing its policy of decentralisation, entailing the maximisation of local participation in decision-making and policy implementation (Nandi 2004). However, the non-formalisation of the SCS by the government is seen as one of the challenges undermining its effective functioning and implementation. In a review of the SCS, Mendelsohn and Ward (2001) argue that formalising the SCS would mean benefits of the clusters could be better sustained and fewer problems would be encountered. Lessons learnt from implementing the system could be dealt with within the boundaries of a legal policy framework. In April 2005 the Ministry of Education issued a brief draft national policy on the formalisation of SCS in Namibia, consisting chiefly of findings from the Research and Information Services of Namibia's (RAISON) research on the SCS, inviting input from various stakeholders. However, the Ministry's official position in this draft policy is far from clear.

In seeking to contribute a comparative voice to research on school clusters, this article seeks to address two critical questions:

1. How do school principals in the two countries experience the implementation of the school cluster system?
2. What, if any, are some of the enabling and/or inhibiting factors related to the implementation of the school cluster system?

Fullan (1992) rightly argues that the school principal is a significant element in the context of change. Research on innovation and school effectiveness suggests that the principal has a strong influence on the likelihood of change succeeding. For example, Berman and McLaughlin (1997) found that innovations that have the support of the principal are more likely to perform well. In such innovations, the principal's actions serve to legitimise the change, support teachers psychologically and facilitate the necessary resources. This justifies this article's focus on the principal's experiences.

### **Theoretical framework**

Two broad theoretical frameworks have been adopted in the efforts to develop an understanding of the school cluster system in the two countries studied: first the origins, purposes and models of school clusters are examined and thereafter some of the theories informing the use of school clusters are discussed.

### **Origins, purposes and models of school clusters**

The cluster concept has grown largely from developments in educational micro plan-

ning (Bray 1984). Proponents of such planning argue that even in the smallest country it is impossible for the central Ministry of Education to know the specific conditions of every school and its locality (Bray 1987). Therefore, while it remains essential to have a national framework within which all schools operate, it is equally necessary to treat each locality as unique. Thus micro planning implies a degree of decentralisation of decision-making to individual school and cluster levels.

Chief among the purposes of cluster schemes are economic, pedagogic and political elements (Bray 1987; Mavesera et al. 2000; Gymraig 2001; Dittmar et al. 2002; Botha 2003; Media in Education Trust 2004). The key economic goal relates to improving cost-effectiveness, which may be achieved through sharing facilities, human and material resources. Pedagogically, cluster schemes tend to serve human resource and curriculum development purposes. Politically, clusters can serve to achieve conscientisation and community participation purposes. Paulo Freire, the famous Brazilian education theorist, coined the term 'conscientisation' (Bray 1987) to mean the raising of general awareness or consciousness among people. School clusters in Namibia and Zimbabwe seem to serve similar purposes to those identified above.

Bray (1987) identifies three cluster models on a continuum: the extreme, the intermediate and the least extreme. In the extreme or far-reaching model, cluster committees have very wide decision-making powers. For example, in Sri Lanka and Thailand such committees recommend staff for promotion. In Sri Lanka, cluster committees can transfer staff within the schools in their clusters. In the intermediate model, schools are formally grouped together by higher authorities, but the cluster committees wield far less extensive powers, e.g. the cluster cannot transfer staff among its schools or make recommendations for promotion. This type of model exists in countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia and Papua New Guinea. In the least extreme model, cluster membership is voluntary. In as much as schools group themselves together, they can abandon the association if they so wish. Usually the schools appoint committees to organise meetings and to supervise the implementation of decisions. There are very few sanctions to regulate the behaviour of member schools. Overall, Bray argues that the success of any cluster model largely depends on the support it enjoys at the macro and micro levels of the society.

Both the Zimbabwean and Namibian school cluster systems seem to fall under Bray's Intermediate Model, in that schools are formally grouped but the cluster has limited powers.

### **Some theories informing the school cluster system**

The idea of clustering schools is located within the broad notion of decentralisation of education. Decentralisation of education has to do with moving the power and authority formerly vested in the higher tiers of an education system to the lower levels such as districts, school clusters and individual schools. As Bush and Middlewood

(2005: 6) rightly argue, the 'shift to decentralisation of education, sometimes involving greater autonomy for schools, is widespread'. This notion of global decentralisation of education is informed by the argument that highly centralised systems tend to be too bureaucratic and allow schools and local communities very little discretion. Leaders operating in such tightly controlled systems experience difficulties in developing distinctive visions for their schools and cannot manage staff effectively.

One such theory is collaborative management. Clegg, Kornberger and Pitsis (2005) argue that collaborative management ensures cooperation, mollifies conflicts and advocates integration. They further observe that collaborative management is an important means to access new knowledge and transfer skills that an organisation needs. These notions of skills transfer and mutual learning, increased cooperation and decreased conflict underlie the purpose of the SCS. However, Whitaker cited by Ipangelwa (2002) cautions that creating a collaborative management culture also requires those in senior management positions learning to see their leadership role as one of empowering others in the organisation rather than controlling them. This implies collaborative and interactive leadership among education managers at macro, meso and micro levels.

Another perspective is teamwork. Lussier and Achua (2001: 249) construe teamwork as the 'understanding and commitment to group goals on the part of all team members'. In the process of interaction team members learn from each other and combine skills needed to accomplish the team task. Therefore teams are considered to be highly specialised groups characterised by equality as well as individual and group responsibility and accountability.

Hayes (2002) argues that an organisation can go much further in the process of team management, by building self-managed teams and transforming these into self-leading teams. Self-managed teams can be distinguished from ordinary teams by their involvement in team learning. According to Heller (1998: 28), self-managed teams are characterised by the

culture of sharing leadership roles, a high rate of autonomy, open discussion leading to democratic decision-making, control over team activities and total self-accountability based on individual and team results.

Besides speeding up decision-making and innovation, self-managed teams inspire organisation members to connect with the organisational vision. Lussier and Achua (2001: 251) argue that at their best self-managed teams succeed because most people are 'goal-directed social beings who gain a feeling of satisfaction from achieving goals with others'. The notion of self-managed teams can be of benefit to the SCS because their practices create a work environment that stimulates people to become self-motivated.

Finally, the SCS represents a radical departure from the traditional hierarchical, centrally controlled system of education governance and it seems fair to claim that

clusters that fail to learn continually are unlikely to thrive or even survive, hence the notion of learning organisations (Braham 1996; Dutton in Senge et al. 2000; Senge 2006). Garvin (in Schultz 2003: 82) defines learning organisations as organisations that are 'skilled at creating, acquiring and transferring knowledge, and modifying their behaviour to reflect the new knowledge and insights'. Implementation of the SCS as a reform strategy in education requires cluster members to interact and learn together, nurturing inter-relationships among themselves as well as with their external environment, to bring about improvement (Lunenburg and Ornstein 2004).

## **Methods**

Both studies used a qualitative, interpretive approach, with the intention of gaining an in-depth understanding of how school principals experienced the implementation of the SCS. The interpretive approach allows the researcher to understand the situation of the phenomenon and to interpret meaning within the social and cultural context of the natural setting (Cantrell 1993). Both studies used the case study method in order to gain intensive, holistic descriptions and analyses of the school clustering system in each case (Smith 1987; Merriam 1998). Case studies focus on contemporary phenomena within their real-life contexts (Yin 2003; Smith 1999).

In the Zimbabwe study, one cluster comprising five primary schools was studied. Each school constituted a site, so the inquiry became a multi-site case study. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with the five principals. The interviews focused on principals' experiences regarding the level of achievement of three of the goals of the cluster system, namely the development of school heads' school management competences; the establishment of a sustainable continuous staff development structure; and the broadening of the role of the School Development Committee. One session of about one hour was held with each principal at their school at mutually agreed times. All interview sessions were tape-recorded with the permission of the respondents.

The Namibian study was conducted in two cluster centres of one circuit. The respondents were two cluster centre principals purposefully selected in collaboration with the inspector of that circuit as well as the school principals in the two clusters. This paper reports on principals' views on five issues: the SCS's organisational outcomes; personal positive outcomes from the SCS; the CCPs' perceptions of their leadership and management roles; challenges experienced in implementing the SCS; and recommendations towards improving the implementation of the SCS.

A triangulation of data collection methods, namely document analysis, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, was used. A range of documents, including cluster visions and mission statements, minutes of cluster meetings, cluster year plans and cluster development plans, were studied. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the two cluster centre principals. Focus group discussions were

conducted with school principals at each cluster centre. Interviews were conducted in English and tape-recorded with the respondents' permission.

In both studies, data was analysed through categorising it according to emerging themes (Denzin 1978; Bassey 1999). Further categorisation was done according to the research focus areas. In the Namibian study, data from the various sources was triangulated. On the basis of these processes, data was interpreted and conclusions reached.

## Findings

### The Zimbabwean study

*Biographical data:* Two of the five principals held a bachelor's degree. The other three were all studying for their first degree. The minimum academic qualification to head a primary school in the country was an 'Ordinary Level' pass of five subjects including English and Mathematics and a three or four-year teacher's diploma (depending on when it was acquired). Thus, the school heads in the study were, overall, fairly highly qualified. Of the five, four were teaching principals and the one was non-teaching. The teaching/non-teaching status was determined by the school enrolment and concomitantly the number of teachers.

*How the cluster system fared in developing school heads' competences in school management:* The development of school heads' competences in school management is one of the objectives of the BSPZ and the cluster system is the instrument for achieving this goal.

Interviews with the principals suggested that in most cases staff development action plans of both individual schools and the cluster tended to focus on the teacher (e.g. the teaching of specific subjects) and were silent on the development needs of school heads. In this regard, one principal had the following to say:

The cluster system should serve the needs of teachers, school heads and parent governors, but in practice programmes centre on teachers. School heads tend to look down upon the cluster as an avenue for their own development.

However, this did not mean that principals did not feel the need for development on their part. In fact, all of them felt they lacked necessary school management competences. One principal reported:

We need to be developed in areas such as financial management, supervision of teaching, managing the building of school infrastructure, as well as in current issues such as HIV/AIDS. The cluster concept is very good, but it still lacks advocacy and practical activities, particularly ours.

It emerged that principals tended to value the training they received from their superiors more than that offered at the local level in the cluster. They reported that as

link persons between their schools and district and provincial education offices, they also received some training from officials in these offices.

On the relationship between the latter training and cluster activities, one principal said:

There is often not much synchronisation between the two. But as a school head, I need to constantly interact with those in higher tiers of the system, because they make the most decisions. So, yes, the cluster remains important largely for teachers' needs and there are many of them.

In addition, the principals were also of the view that district and provincial education officials in a sense contributed to the malfunctioning of the cluster system through the reported lack of synchronisation between these officials' staff development initiatives and those supposed to emanate from within the clusters. This, the principals felt, suggested a lack of respect for the role of school clusters on the part of those in higher offices. In addition to this lack of coordination, the principals reported that they did not get adequate staff development both ways. Thus, they were entangled in the dilemma that on the one hand they did not benefit from the cluster structure on their doorstep and on the other their superiors did not offer them much help.

The responses thus far suggest a strong resistance to change (Fullan 2003) on the part of the principals. They also point to a strong subordinate-superordinate relationship (Smyth and Van der Vegt 1993) between teachers and principals, in which the latter believe they cannot benefit from local initiatives from which the former learn. This relationship was equally strong between principals and education officials in the district and provincial offices.

The principals also reported that from the time the donor had wound up the funding of the BSPZ programme, staff development activities in the cluster had dwindled drastically. The cluster had reportedly not been financially able to sustain the momentum that the donor era had set. Funds were not available to invite experts from outside the cluster.

In addition to the learning needs reported above, all four teaching principals in the cluster reported that one of their greatest challenges was coping with both full-time teaching and management duties. One of them commented:

As a teaching head, I am called upon to perform both teaching and management duties well. It is very difficult to do justice to both. Usually my class suffers. As a consequence, I am now unpopular with teachers in the school because I have to ask them to teach my class while I attend to administrative issues. Perhaps we should undergo training in time management.

The interviews revealed that the principals were convinced that they needed management development and that they were quite clear about the specific areas in question. However, they had a low opinion of the cluster as an instrument that could address these needs. To these principals, the cluster was not achieving this particular capacity-building role, despite the fact that decision-making authority had been

officially decentralised to schools and clusters to conduct their own staff development programmes.

*Perception of the cluster system as an organisational structure sustaining continuous staff development:* The establishment of a structure for continuous staff growth was another of the BSPZ's objectives. As in all effective organisations (Fullan 1992), continuous staff growth in terms of knowledge and skills is necessary. For example, challenges such as fund-raising and the management of new curricula require continuous staff growth (McGinn and Welsh 1999).

As above, the principals felt that the BSPZ cluster structure was not serving its purpose. The BSPZ was dubbed a debt collector because it levied clusters, which in turn levied individual schools. Schools felt that there was no transparency in the way the money was used at district level. There was therefore a lack of faith among the stakeholders, rendering the structure unattractive as a tool for continuous staff development.

The principals reported that because the status of a school was determined by the size of its enrolment, there tended to be stiff competition for learners among neighbouring schools. They felt that this pressure tended to kill the cooperative spirit behind the cluster system, as individual schools fought for survival – there seemed to be tension between national policy and local realities. One principal commented:

All of us as individual neighbouring schools are working hard to attract more learners. The more learners a school has, the more stable the staff and so you can get good examination results. The more learners we have, the more revenue we can get, and the better the school status. In as much as we are a cluster, each school has its individual interests.

Notwithstanding the tension reported above, the principals reported that the cluster was not engaging in continuous staff development as much as it had previously. One principal reported:

We are now witnessing fewer and fewer cluster workshops. This is because we are unable to finance them as a cluster. Some member schools have not paid their levies for a long time. The spirit of oneness is threatened.

Another sentiment shared by all the principals related to the organisation of the cluster, which they argued was detrimental to its success. They felt that the structure of the cluster, in which an ordinary teacher (the resource teacher) coordinated all cluster activities, was counter-productive because school principals tended to disrespect such structures owing to the above-mentioned long-standing subordinate-superordinate relationship. One principal explained:

A cluster is chaired by one of the school heads therein. In our case, we have not yet replaced the former chairperson, who has transferred to another area. However, the resource teacher coordinates all staff development activities, but as you might know, there is usually a leadership tension between teachers and school heads.

The school heads further argued that because the cluster resource teachers were full-time classroom practitioners in schools, they were at the mercy of the principal of their school in terms of getting time off to pursue cluster activities. They suggested that appointing one of the heads to lead the affairs of the cluster would turn around its fortunes. Further probing revealed that the idea of having school heads leading clusters had been discouraged all along owing to a widely agreed notion that decision-making authority needed to be spread beyond the principals, to the teachers. This would be consistent with the spirit of shared decision-making, an important ingredient of the notion of decentralisation, which informed the cluster concept.

Overall, what emerged is that while the principals cherished the idea of the cluster, they did not see it as achieving the goal of being a vehicle for continuous growth. Militating factors existed that needed to be addressed before the cluster could achieve this goal.

*Extension by the cluster system of the role of School Development Committees from that of just providing physical infrastructure to full partners in the school system:* Another objective of the BSPZ cluster programme was to expand the capacities of School Development Committees (SDCs), particularly the parent component, so that they became full partners in the running of schools, as opposed to mere providers of schools' physical infrastructure. Principals reported that the SDC had a very strong influence on the community's overall perception of the school. Such influence was the committee's power base within the school. For example, in one school the SDC was able to bring parents to resume paying school fees and levies after they had discontinued payment following embezzlement of school funds by the principal.

However, the principals interviewed reported that currently SDC parent members were rarely involved in cluster workshops. One principal explained:

When the cluster system started, we used to have parent governors in workshops. Donor funding was making this possible. Today, individual schools struggle to pay the minimum subscriptions to the cluster. As a result, the parent component has tended to remain active at individual school level.

The interviews revealed another complication regarding the functioning of the SDC. SDCs are a structure of the Ministry of Local Government tasked to govern the affairs of schools within the jurisdiction of a local municipality. However, schools are a structure of the Ministry of Education. It emerged that there was no visible plan between the two ministries regarding capacity-building for parent governors and so the SDC structure was neglected.

Despite the constraints mentioned above, the principals reported that the SDC was important, not only as the school financier, but also as mediator in cases of school-community conflict. In the eyes of the school principals, therefore, SDCs played a much bigger role than was apparent on the surface. In this connection, one principal

had this to say:

Parent governors are my conduit to the community. However, due to their general low levels of education, they rely on the headmaster to tell them their functions in the school. On this note, I can say they are not yet full partners in the running of the school, but they remain important. Sadly, the cluster system is not helping.

Overall, the principals interviewed perceived the SDC as an important player in the running of schools, but the objective of expanding its role was not being achieved. The cluster system was reportedly weakening by the day.

### **The Namibian study**

*The SCS's organisational outcomes:* The implementation of the SCS had several positive outcomes in terms of organisational management and educational leadership practices at the local level.

The initial idea of grouping schools and implementing the SCS in the Omusati region is clearly documented in a letter from the Director of Research and Information Services of Namibia (RAISON), dated 19.04.2002, addressed to the Directors of the Ondangwa East and Ondangwa West Educational Regions. It reads:

As you recall ... at Midgard, we had planned that I visit Ondangwa to plan new circuit boundaries and also to have a firm framework of inspection circuits in relation to all school clusters. Having these new inspection circuits will therefore lay the way for the launching of clusters. From the Permanent Secretary ... the allocation of inspectors is expected to be as follows: Oshana 4, Omusati 8, Oshikoto 4 and Ohangwena 6. These are the numbers of posts allocated using the formula of 35 schools per inspector, and a request for the creation of new posts has been sent to the Public Service Commission.

Documents indicate that structures were also created at cluster level. Minutes of a Cluster Management Committee meeting at one cluster centre, dated 04.03.2004, show three topics on the agenda, namely feedback, establishment of committees and a five-year plan. Minutes of a Cluster Management Committee meeting dated 27 April 2004 showed that members established the following cluster-based committees on the same day: Cluster Development Committee, Cluster Academic Committee, Cluster Promotion Committee and Cluster Disciplinary Committee.

*Devolution of decision-making authority:* One CCP remarked that the SCS was a very good strategy for addressing government's decentralisation policy. The CCP reported that in the past schools were centrally administered. All meetings were held at circuit offices, materials were collected by schools from the regional head office and school principals travelled long distances. The CCP said:

Distances have been made shorter because schools now collect most of their needs at their cluster centres, no more at the circuit and regional offices. In some cases delivery and dispatch of goods and some equipment goes through to cluster centres. Most information is also channelled to schools via the cluster centre. That means services have been brought closer to the schools.

The other CCP said it was now her role and responsibility to coordinate educational activities at the circuit level by visiting other satellite schools, to organise meetings such as cluster management meetings, subject group meetings and parent meetings, and to ensure that information channelled to the cluster centre from the circuit and regional offices is disseminated to all schools.

Regarding possibilities for increased interaction at local level, one CCP reported that the SCS made principals work as a team, decide on uniform activities to be undertaken by all schools in the cluster and work together in tackling common educational issues. They coordinate meetings of various committees to work together on assigned tasks, such as organising sports events and cultural and commemoration days, setting examinations and tests and planning cluster-based workshops.

In a focus group discussion at one cluster centre, a principal reported that he was satisfied with the SCS implementation because he felt schools now came together to discuss issues about school administration and subject and examination problems and to propose the way forward. He said, 'Above all, the system is very inductive; it allows interaction through sport activities and sharing of ideas among various stakeholders.'

Another principal reported that as a cluster they agreed on and prioritised their schools' needs. Issues of learner transfer, enrolment and admission requirements were also discussed. Documents studied confirm these impressions. For instance, a cluster management meeting at one cluster centre on 18 February 2005, discussed Grade 1 and Grade 8 enrolments. It also looked at new matters such as cluster subjects and management meetings, short-term and long-term cluster plans, audits of schools' finances and information dissemination during parents' meetings. Another meeting discussed mid-year examinations, curricular projects at schools, staffing norms, leave forms and several housing issues.

*Personal positive outcomes:* Documents revealed that numerous workshops on the SCS were offered on a continuous basis by CCPs and other stakeholders at regional and circuit level after the formal launch of SCS in the region. These included workshops for all principals and CCPs, a week-long training session for all CCPs as well as one-day workshops for CCPs in all circuits, meeting at three different selected circuits between 1 and 3 February 2006.

Other official correspondence also showed that training needs for these workshops were solicited from the participants through their supervisors. Some of the requests submitted to the Chief Inspector on 14 March 2003 for training during the May school holidays included school visit techniques, sports coaching skills, meeting organisation and management, school needs assessment techniques, educational programme planning, monitoring and evaluation, roles and responsibilities of a cluster head, and roles and responsibilities of inspectors in the cluster system.

On the professional benefits and usefulness of these workshops and training one CCP stated:

The Ministry is also planning and organising workshops and training for cluster centre principals. It is during those meetings that a number of new skills, information and knowledge are communicated to cluster centre principals in order to run their clusters effectively.

The SCS was also reported as allowing for increased interaction and cooperative learning activities at cluster level. One CCP pointed out that before the implementation of the SCS, the April examinations had been set mainly at individual schools, but they were now set at the cluster centre by the various subject facilitators.

*Challenges as perceived by CCPs and principals:* Inadequate resources emerged as a major problem. One CCP highlighted the lack of facilities such as offices, conference halls, classrooms and government vehicles at cluster centres as a major hindrance. The other CCP shared similar sentiments and further reported that clusters had no secretaries to undertake cluster administrative chores such as typing cluster-based examinations and minutes of meetings. They had to rely on a few school secretaries.

Related to resources, the respondents reported that there was inadequate system support. One CCP pointed out that she found it difficult to cope with being a CCP and to manage time properly. She explained:

As a CCP you are a coordinator of other schools in the cluster ... the manager of your own school and also a teacher. To me, time is a big challenge. ... The free periods allocated to me as a principal to do administration work at my school and attend to marking exercise books, I use them now to conduct cluster visits to satellite schools.

One principal in the focus group discussion explained that managing cluster centres with limited resources was putting a strain on CCPs' work. He said: 'It is a burden to the cluster head. She has to run the school ... the cluster, without transport.' He said that because some cluster centres had poor facilities, they were at a disadvantage in attracting capable teachers. He added that a decrease in learner enrolments in some schools, caused by parents transferring learners to schools with better results, not only negatively affected the school in question, but disadvantaged the whole cluster, because the government's allocation of resources was determined and influenced by the population it was meant to benefit.

Another challenge reported was inadequate capacity to implement the SCS. According to one CCP, some principals who were members of the cluster management committee were under-prepared and did not understand the current trend of co-managing cluster centres. The CCP argued:

Some of the members do not have a good level of understanding on educational issues such as the SCS and that is a challenge. One needs to educate the principals so as to push the cluster together in the desired direction.

The other CCP felt that the cascade system (few people attending workshops and

relaying the process downwards) used to introduce the SCS was not effective. Some teachers did not really take ownership of cluster-based activities when allocated certain responsibilities because the system was not adequately explained to them. These situations prevailed despite the fact that several circulars and information on the SCS had been disseminated and were accessible to teachers at each school.

### **Discussion and implications**

This paper reports on two small-scale studies in Namibia and Zimbabwe. Thus, although it is not claimed that the implications drawn in this section are easily generalisable to all parts of each country respectively, they are useful signposts to all who 'walk the school cluster journey' in the two countries, as either researchers or decision-makers.

The cluster system was designed to serve similar purposes in both countries. Consistent with what the literature suggests, these purposes include economic (the sharing of resources), pedagogic (the improvement of teaching and learning) and political (increasing participatory decision-making at the grassroots levels) elements. In line with the educational micro planning perspective that every locality needs to be treated as unique, entailing some degree of decentralised decision-making authority to that local level, respondents in both countries perceived the cluster structure as a very desirable, well-positioned grassroots innovation created to help schools help themselves through capacity-building programmes. This was one of the factors enabling this reform. However, in both Namibia and Zimbabwe, some level of indecision prevailed regarding the policy framework guiding the cluster system. In Namibia this was evidenced by the reported non-formalisation of the SCS. In Zimbabwe, while the cluster system was formalised, there was no policy binding a school to actively belong to a cluster. Thus the two scenarios present the least extreme cluster model. While this model accords schools a great deal of freedom, such latitude comes with little macro-level support. Findings suggest that this model is likely to be the least productive in terms of achievement of intended goals.

Still on the impact of policy, findings show that in both countries, on the one hand, the competitive nature of neighbouring schools as they sought to increase their enrolments tended to dampen the spirit of teamwork required in a cluster set-up. On the other, the competition presented parents with a desirable choice in where to send their children to school, all other factors influencing this decision being equal. An appropriate cluster model would be one that focuses on achieving higher levels of educational quality for all the participating schools, thereby reducing undue competition among them.

Another policy matter related to organisational structure. In Namibia, the principal was the 'driver' of the cluster system, whereas in Zimbabwe, while a principal chaired the cluster, a resource teacher coordinated staff development programmes, partic-

ularly those directed at teachers. The former model can be argued to be consistent with the hierarchical nature of schools as organisations in which the principal is at the apex and therefore commands positional power and respect in order to be able to spearhead development programmes. The latter model can be argued to be consistent with the notion of participatory democracy in which more 'players' must participate in leadership. Findings from the two studies suggest that the former model seemed to work better. Thus, the lesson seems to be that the nature of the policy framework within which an innovation such as the cluster system operates is a major determinant of the success or failure of that reform. What works in one set-up may not work in another.

Another organisational matter impacting on the functioning of the cluster related to workloads. In Namibia, the cluster centre principal was reportedly overloaded. In Zimbabwe, the teaching principal was similarly overloaded. Thus work overload seemed to be an inhibiting factor in the smooth functioning of the cluster system in both cases. These findings suggest a lack of adequate support for local structures on the part of the higher echelons of the education systems. This confirms Bray's (1987) argument that the success of any cluster model depends on the support it enjoys at micro, meso and macro levels.

Findings revealed that the cluster system was 'alive and kicking' in Namibia, but under severe threat of extinction in Zimbabwe, at least in the one cluster studied. In both cases the initial periods of the cluster reform were largely donor-funded. The Zimbabwe scenario confirms an apparent consistent tendency for developing countries to fail to sustain noble educational reforms that are initially donor-funded. While in Namibia there still remained some reliance on central government to fund the cluster system, particularly with regard to infrastructure, the trend towards self-reliance on the part of grassroots structures such as the cluster system is evident. The decentralisation trend in most countries almost always entails cost-cutting and cost-recovery on the part of central governments. It therefore seems that the sooner the cluster system begins to become self-sustaining, the better.

The cluster system should not only be about restructuring, but also about re-culturing, i.e. revising value systems, e.g. encouraging principals to have teachers make more binding decisions in the school. In Zimbabwe, principals had a low opinion of teacher-led cluster activities, because of both the existing hierarchical structure of the school as an organisation and the concomitant culture in which the principal's status was always higher than that of the teacher. The principals' attitude thus had a negative influence at the micro level, which seemed to pose another threat to the SCS. The failure to re-culture and allow more participatory decision-making appeared to be an inhibiting factor against the success of the cluster system.

Still considering the need to re-culture or change attitudes, unlike in most cases in developing countries where lack of capacity is usually a factor inhibiting reform,

implementation of the cluster system in the two countries studied did not face this problem. In Zimbabwe, for example, all the principals consulted had above-minimum qualifications. However, this available human resource was not adequately exploited for the betterment of the clusters in either case. Instead, cluster participants looked upward in the system for help. The clusters studied can thus be said to have been under-utilising their own resources, with a confidence-building exercise being necessary to turn around the situation.

## Conclusion

The cluster system seems to be a noble idea through which neighbouring schools can develop themselves. It is consistent with the notion of participatory democracy and good governance. This reform needs systemic support from the micro to the macro levels of an education system. In addition, the cluster system as a form of restructuring needs to be complemented by systemic re-culturing.

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# Procedural and substantive knowledge: Some implications of an outcomes-based history curriculum in South Africa

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## Abstract

In an outcomes-based system, learning outcomes specify skills and not content. This paper addresses the issue of what happens to skills and content (or to procedural knowledge and substantive knowledge) as the curriculum unfolds. The case here is the unfolding of the South African history curriculum (Grades 10–12), from the official curriculum documents to teacher training and textbooks, into three different Grade 10 classrooms. It describes how the official message of the history curriculum is recontextualised and reinterpreted by various actors at these different levels. What emerges is a story of the relationship between the procedural dimension and the knowledge dimension of history. There appears to be the danger that the logic of outcomes, the need to attain assessment standards and the strong focus on a skills-based history may lead to a focus on generic comprehension skills rather than a conceptual understanding of history and its constructed nature.

**Key words:** Knowledge, history curriculum, outcomes, curriculum reform, South Africa

## Introduction and background

This study is focused on the school subject of history, but will likely have implications for other subjects. It is argued in this paper that there is an inherent danger in an outcomes-based system that the focus on procedural knowledge can overshadow substantive knowledge. A wide range of data, including analysis of the history curriculum documents, participant observation of a provincial teacher training workshop in 2005, interviews with writers and publishers from three publishing houses, classroom observation of three Grade 10 history teachers, interviews with these teachers and analysis of the assessment tasks set by these teachers in 2005 and

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2006, is drawn on to substantiate this claim. The purpose of this paper is to focus on the 'big picture' or the broad narrative that emerges from the data, rather than on the micro details, which have been described elsewhere (Bertram 2008a).

The paper begins with an overview of curriculum change in South Africa since 1998, with a specific focus on the history curriculum. It then describes the theoretical framework used to structure the data, which is Bernstein's notion of the pedagogic device. The pedagogic device provides the structuring framework to hold the data at each of the levels of the device. The paper aims to describe the relationship between procedural and substantive knowledge in history as the curriculum implementation process unfolds at each level or field of the pedagogic device. A description will be given of what is meant here by procedural and substantive knowledge.

### **Outcomes-based education in South Africa**

When faced with the challenge of reforming apartheid education, South African policy-makers chose an outcomes-based education system coupled with a National Qualifications Framework (NQF). Policy-makers in the Department of Labour were active in education reform, strongly proposing an integrated approach to education and training, and arguing for a single competence-based qualification framework (Aitchison 2003; Christie 1997). This focus on competence, which soon merged into the idea of outcomes, was to have far-reaching consequences for education as an outcomes-based school curriculum was embraced.

In 1996, an NQF was launched that aimed to unite education and training. The assumption was that outcome descriptors at different levels could be generic and thus learners could reach these through a range of different learning paths. A key idea was that teachers would develop learning programmes that would be 'designed down' from the learning outcomes. Learning programmes would not be based on the 'internal requirements or logic of a knowledge area; instead knowledge areas should be selected on the basis that they can lead to the competence in question' (Allais 2006: 25).

The outcomes-based school curriculum, Curriculum 2005, was unveiled in 1997. It was implemented in Grade 1 classrooms in 1998. The new curriculum has the following implications in respect of knowledge, pedagogy and assessment: In terms of knowledge, the principle of integration underpins the school curriculum; knowledge is integrated across the manual/mental as well as across the school/everyday knowledge divides. In terms of pedagogy, the curriculum is informed by a learner-centred ideology. And in terms of assessment, there is a range of outcomes per learning area or subject. Learners should reach these learning outcomes through meeting a range of assessment standards.

This new curriculum was received in different ways. Many teachers embraced it as a political project different from apartheid education, but their pedagogical responses were uneven (Harley and Wedekind 2004). Criticism focused on two main areas:

problems with implementing the curriculum and problems with the structure of the curriculum itself (Christie 1999; Jansen 1999b).

The appointment of a new Minister of Education in 1999 made a review of Curriculum 2005 possible. A Review Committee was appointed in 2000. Amongst the recommendations of the Review Committee were that the jargon of C2005 be reduced and that a streamlined National Curriculum Statement (NCS) be developed that would detail the curriculum requirements at various levels in clear and simple language (Department of Education 2000a). The new NCS documents reduced the number of outcomes per learning area and introduced a stronger knowledge dimension to the school curriculum, but the principles of OBE remained unchanged.

As a result of the curriculum review, a revised set of curriculum statements were developed in 2002 for the General Education and Training (GET) band, which comprises Grades R–9. Shortly afterwards a set of National Curriculum Statements was developed for the Further Education and Training band (Grades 10–12). It is the FET history curriculum that is described here.

There have been a number of studies in South Africa that focus on the implementation of the new curriculum (for example, Education 2000 Plus 2002; Jansen 1999a; Reeves 1999; Stoffels 2004). Most of these have focused on the extent to which teachers have succeeded or failed in implementing the new curriculum. The focus of this study is the recontextualising of the curriculum message as it moves from the curriculum writers, to the written curriculum document, to teacher training, to text book writers and finally to teachers in history classrooms. The study assumes that the ‘roll-out’ of a curriculum message is not smooth and that teachers will not easily and seamlessly adopt all the requirements of official policy. It focuses on ways in which the official policy message is re-interpreted and recontextualised at various points in the implementation process. It is concerned with what Ball calls policy trajectory studies, which ‘employ a cross-sectional rather than a single-level analysis by tracing policy formulation, struggle and response from within the state itself through to the various recipients of policy’ (Ball 1993: 51).

### **Theoretical framework**

The study uses a particular sociological theory, Bernstein’s pedagogic device, as a framework to tell the story of curriculum recontextualisation in the subject of history. The pedagogic device is an effort to describe the general principles that underlie the transformation of knowledge into pedagogic communication (Bernstein 1996).

Bernstein uses the term to refer to systemic and institutionalised ways in which knowledge is recontextualised from the field of knowledge production into the school system and its distribution and evaluation within the schooling system (Jacklin 2004: 28). The pedagogic device answers the question: ‘How does a society circulate its

various forms of knowledge and how is consciousness specialised in society’s image?’ (Maton and Muller 2007: 18).

There is not space in this paper to enter into the theoretical complexities of the pedagogic device; rather, it is used for structuring or ordering the data. Bernstein (1996, 1999) provides a language of description to describe pedagogic discourse as well as a language to describe vertical and horizontal knowledge structures and discourses. These were used in the bigger study upon which this article draws (Bertram 2008a). This paper, however, uses the distinction between procedural and substantive knowledge. The key question is then: How does the relationship between procedural and substantive knowledge change, as the FET history curriculum is recontextualised at the various levels of the pedagogic device?

Table 1 describes the arena of the pedagogic device, which makes the fields of practice clear.

**The field of production**

The study begins with an examination of the discipline of history as historians practise it. This is located within the field of production of the pedagogic device. It is concerned with the way in which historians produce the discourse of history. The key concerns here are the structure and nature of the discipline of history. The typical agents in this field are academics and professional historians. There is a particular logic or structure that defines the discourse of history at this level. It is necessary to describe what this particular logic is, before being able to ascertain the extent to which the recontextualising fields draw on this logic to select what becomes defined as ‘school history’.

**Table 1: The arena of the pedagogic device (Maton and Muller, 2007: 18)**

<b>Field of practice</b>	Production	Recontextualisation	Recontextualisation
<b>Form of regulation</b>	Distributive rules	Recontextualising rules	Evaluative rules
<b>Kinds of symbolic structure</b>	Knowledge structure	Curriculum	Pedagogy and evaluation
<b>Principal types</b>	Hierarchical and horizontal knowledge structures	Collection and integrated curriculum codes	Visible and invisible pedagogies
<b>Typical agents</b>	Academics, professional historians	Curriculum writers, teacher educators, textbook writers	Teachers
<b>Typical sites</b>	Research papers, conferences, laboratories	Curriculum policy, textbooks, learning aids	Classrooms and examinations (assessment tasks)

The field of production is essentially concerned with knowledge structure, and here Bernstein provides us with the distinction between hierarchical and horizontal knowledge structures within the vertical discourse of formal academic knowledge (Maton and Muller 2007). History would be seen as a horizontal knowledge structure within a vertical discourse. Its speciality comes from its mode of interrogation and the criteria for the construction of historical texts, rather than a search for a theory that encompasses all others. Time, chronology and sequencing are key aspects of historical discourse (Martin 2007). The search for key explanatory concepts for interpreting the nature of change is at the centre of the enterprise.

Describing history as a horizontal knowledge structure does not take us far enough in understanding the structure and logic of the discipline of history. For this, it is necessary to look to the discipline itself. Leinhardt (1994) describes an extensive study, which included interviews with and classroom observations of both schoolteachers and historians. The interviews were focused on how historians understand what reasoning in history means. The historians agreed that it was vital to construct a compelling narrative that has internal coherence. Narrative coherence included mystery, discovery, exhaustive evidence, chronology and causality. Exhaustive evidence means considering all the evidence that could be found to support or to contradict the case. Historians work with large quantities of information, and thus need devices to impose some kind of organisation. One such device is using chronology to order events, and another is establishing plausible causality. The work of a historian is to build a historical case, to develop a central hypothesis and to build a narrative around it. It is vital that the evidence be interpreted in terms of the context of the original times and the implications of evidential survival (i.e. an understanding of why particular evidence exists and other evidence does not). Seixas (1999: 332) puts it thus 'Practicing history involves reworking, analysing and interpreting traces and accounts of the past to construct narratives ...'.

The concepts of 'substantive' and 'procedural' dimensions of history are also useful in understanding the work of historians. Dean (2004) makes the point that history is made up of two complementary, inter-linked strands, which are content and process. She draws on Schwab (1978), who described these strands as (a) syntactic or procedural knowledge, which is knowledge about conducting historical enquiry or 'know-how' knowledge, and (b) substantive or propositional knowledge, which represents the statements of fact, and the propositions and concepts which are constructed as a result of the procedural investigations carried out by historians. Procedural and substantive knowledge are inter-twined and are both fundamental to the work of the historian.

Substantive history is the content of history, what history is 'about' ... procedural ideas about history ... concepts like historical evidence, explanation, change are ideas that provide our understanding of history as a discipline or form of knowledge. They are not what history is about but they shape the way we go about doing history (Lee and Ashby, 2001, cited in Husbands, Kitson and Pendry, 2003: 69).

The key point here is that historians engage with sources in particular ways that are always informed by a substantive knowledge of the particular period, as sources cannot be read and understood apart from this knowledge. For historians, knowing and doing history cannot be separated.

While there is not a strict vertical progression of content within the discipline of history, this does not mean that history does not have a substantive body of knowledge that defines it. Both the substantive knowledge and the procedural knowledge must be developed together to create a person with a historical gaze (Bertram 2008a). Historical knowledge comprises a set of factual claims as well as an understanding of how those claims have been constructed (Seixas 1999).

### **The official recontextualising field (ORF)**

In the modern context, the selected ministries and agents of the state dominate the ORF. In this field, a particular discipline is recontextualised into an official school curriculum. The state employs agents to make selections from the field of production in order to design an official school curriculum. This section will first describe this recontextualisation at a generic level and then focus specifically on South Africa. The question is: How is the discipline of history recontextualised into a school curriculum? What is the relationship between the substantive knowledge and procedural dimensions in the curriculum documents?

British authors, Husbands, Kitson and Pendry (2003: 9) describe the 'great tradition' and the 'alternative tradition' approaches to school history. The great tradition, where the role of the history teacher was to give pupils the facts of historical knowledge, dominated history teaching in British schools for much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The pupil's role was to receive the body of knowledge, which was clearly defined, chronologically organised and framed by high politics. History was taught for largely intrinsic (rather than instrumental) and cultural reasons, predominantly the 'acquisition of a relatively complex knowledge about an assumed shared national political culture'.

The assumptions of the 'great tradition' came under pressure in Britain with the establishment of the Schools' Council in 1963, which asked fundamental questions about the organisation and structure of the curriculum in England and Wales. The Schools' Council projects developed an 'alternative tradition' of history teaching with quite different assumptions about the role of the teacher, the selection of content and the purposes of teaching history. This 'alternative' tradition emphasised constructivist models of learner engagement with the past, world history, the experiences of a variety of groups and a focus on historical skills. Students are introduced to the nature of historical evidence, the nature of reasoning from evidence and the problem of reconstruction from partial and mixed evidence (Wineburg 2001). In this paradigm history is understood as being about power and politics and is not presented as something 'neutral'.

In South Africa, history teaching during apartheid was mostly located in the traditional fact-learning tradition (Kros 1996; Sishi 1995; Morrell 1990). But there were some teachers who did teach in more progressive and critical ways. The Report of the History and Archaeology Panel (Department of Education 2000b: 13) noted that it should not be forgotten ‘that a muscular tradition of enlightened, alternative history education emerged under and against the apartheid system, developing influential potential capacity for shaping new pedagogy’. However, for many people ‘history teaching was symbolic of apartheid’ (Chisholm 2005: 199). After 1994, there were considerable contestations over the inclusion of history in the new curriculum. In the end history was included, and the new curriculum requires that learners learn source interpretation and about how knowledge and history are constructed. Chisholm (2005: 201) suggests that now ‘[t]he tools for criticism and subverting an official story are embedded in its construction’.

The new South African history curriculum has embraced the vision of history as a mode of enquiry. The Further Education and Training (FET) National Curriculum Statement for history makes it clear that the purpose of history is to develop learners’ skills of historical enquiry and their ability to analyse sources and evidence (Department of Education 2003). There is a focus on developing critical thinking and a view that ‘historical truth consists of a multiplicity of voices expressing varying and often contradictory versions of the same history’ (Department of Education 2005: 7).

The subject writing group that wrote the FET history curriculum had to work with strongly framed guidelines in terms of organising the curriculum around outcomes and assessment standards at the level of the general instructional discourse. The curriculum document is strongly informed by the outcomes and assessment standards, which are made very explicit. Of the entire curriculum document, 37 pages (60%) discuss the issue of assessment (Bertram 2008a). In addition, there is a 37-page document called the Subject Assessment Guidelines for History that outlines how assessment is to be undertaken in Grade 10, 11 and 12. Tests must be based on a range of sources, must be organised around a key question and must conclude with a piece of ‘extended’ writing (Department of Education 2007).

There is a shift from a theory of instruction focused on the teacher to one more focused on the learner. There is a strong emphasis in the NCS on developing historical skills of enquiry – the procedural dimension. Assessment standards show that there is a strong emphasis on conceptual rather than factual knowledge, with an emphasis on the cognitive skills of understanding and analysing. Conceptual knowledge is understood as knowledge of classifications, principles and generalisations, and knowing the interrelationships among basic elements, while factual knowledge consists of terminology and details (Anderson 2005: 106). The Subject Assessment Guidelines show that formal assessment gives greater weight to the procedural than to the substantive dimension. The outcomes (see the figure overleaf) describe the skills that learners should develop, but under-specify the substantive knowledge that they

should have. Siebörger (2006) argues that if one starts to plan with outcomes and assessment standards, rather than with knowledge, one ends up with something that is not history. In the curriculum document, procedural and substantive knowledge are separated, and it is the work of the teacher to bring these together.

Substantive knowledge is listed in the curriculum, and in fact there appears to be more content to cover than in the previous curriculum. Knowledge is presented in more integrated ways than in the previous curriculum and that knowledge is framed by key questions. These key questions signal that history is not presented as neutral but as contested. Knowledge is structured using key historical themes such as power alignment, human rights, issues of civil society and globalisation (Bertram 2006). South African history within an African continental perspective is prioritised (Department of Education 2005: 13).

While school history recontextualises and appropriates the structure of the discourse in different ways, it is also often used to present and promote particular world views. Thus a school curriculum is not simply about pedagogy, knowledge and assessment; it is about particular values. The history curriculum was used during apartheid to advocate Afrikaner nationalism and a Eurocentric perspective on the world (Chisholm 1981; Kros and Vadi 1993). The new curriculum takes a strong stand on Constitutional values, stating that the study of history promotes democracy by developing an understanding and appreciation of Constitutional values. The purpose of history is seen as building people's capacity to make informed choices so that they can contribute constructively to society and advance democracy (Department of Education 2005).

### The pedagogic recontextualising field (PRF)

Agents in the PRF take the official curriculum and recontextualise it as they train teachers, write textbooks or conduct research. These actors are mostly textbook writers, teacher educators and writers of teacher's guides and other learning material.

#### History outcomes for the Further Education and Training phase (Grades 10–12)

<p><b>Learning outcome 1</b>  <i>Enquiry Skills (Practical Competence)</i>            The learner will be able to acquire and apply historical enquiry skills.</p>
<p><b>Learning outcome 2</b>  <i>Historical Concepts (Foundational Competence)</i>            The learner is able to use historical concepts in order to analyse the past.</p>
<p><b>Learning outcome 3</b>  <i>Knowledge Construction and Communication (Reflexive Competence)</i>            The learner is able to construct and communicate historical knowledge and understanding.</p>
<p><b>Learning outcome 4</b>  <i>Heritage (Reflexive Competence)</i>            The learner is able to engage critically with issues around heritage.</p>

**Teacher training**

A provincial subject advisor ran the four-day teacher-training workshop that the author observed in 2005. One day covered issues generic to the new FET curriculum and three days focused only on the history curriculum. The number of teachers present ranged from 26 to 30 over the three days. About a third of the time was taken up by the facilitator explaining or presenting using Power Point presentations, a further third comprised teachers doing particular planning or assessment tasks and the final third was taken up by report-backs and feedback on these tasks. The major thrust of the presentations was the shift from knowing history to doing history and the fact that history is now understood as an enquiry cycle. This cycle begins with a learner asking a key question, then gathering sources to answer the question; then analysing, interpreting and organising the sources and lastly communicating the answer. The facilitator was strongly in favour of the new enquiry-based approach to history, but was somewhat critical of the assessment procedures that he thought were centralised and rigid, rather than flexible.

Each group of teachers was given the task of working with the 'history as enquiry' cycle. Each group had to select sources from a range of topics they were given (slavery, the American War of Independence, the French Revolution, the Industrial Revolution or the Mfecane), think of a key question, and design 10 questions based on the sources they had selected. Each of the questions was to 'target' specific learning outcomes or assessment standards.

The teachers the author observed were working with the Mfecane topic. They took a long time to decide on a key question, and eventually decided on 'What were the internal and external causes that lead to the Mfecane?' The author's fieldnotes at that point show her concern that the task was essentially a technical activity, with teachers trying to design questions that matched the assessment standards, rather than developing a coherent understanding of the topic. There was little sense that teachers were thinking holistically and conceptually about the theme, and what they might have wanted learners to really understand about it. The 'history' or the narrative appeared to be undermined by the technical need to 'cover' particular learning outcomes or assessment standards.

It became clear that many teachers struggled to develop historically meaningful questions based on the sources that were chosen. It appeared that many teachers lacked the depth of substantive knowledge necessary to create meaningful source-based activities as well as the procedural knowledge of what it means to think historically. The group of teachers observed did not appear to recognise that the sources they were given in fact represented the competing theories that various historians have developed to explain why the Mfecane happened. Thus they did not design any questions that required learners to compare or interrogate the theories. Rather they read the sources simply as texts from which learners would extract information. There was no sense that the ideas in the text were contested, or that the history therein

was constructed.

When the teachers presented their choice of sources and the source-based questions that they had designed to the whole group, the feedback from the facilitator seemed to suggest that he was more concerned that the questions ‘covered’ a particular assessment standard than whether they were meaningful in any historical sense. Thus the feedback focused more on the procedural than the substantive knowledge.

The major focus of the teacher training workshop was the pedagogy (using ‘history as enquiry’) and the outcomes and assessment standards. However, the procedures and the assumptions that underpin ‘history as enquiry’ were not interrogated. There was no discussion of what it might mean to ‘learn how to know history’ (Seixas 1999) and to understand history as constructed rather than an absolute truth. There was also no discussion on issues of knowledge, despite the fact that the new Grade 10 curriculum introduces a number of new topics that teachers have never taught before, such as the Songhay Empire. There was also no engagement about what it may mean for teachers to teach history foregrounding Constitutional values. In this particular workshop, it appeared as if the procedural dimension ‘trumps’ the substantive knowledge dimension.

### **Textbooks**

The recontextualising work of the textbook writers is also located within the PRF. The question here is how textbook writers and publishers interpret and recontextualise the curriculum statement. Here data is drawn from interviews with six textbook writers or publishers from three major publishing houses. In South Africa, authors employed by publishing houses and not by the Department of Education write school textbooks. The school market is hugely lucrative for publishers, and thus it is essential that their textbooks meet the criteria set by the Department of Education, which evaluates every textbook before it can be placed on the official list released to schools. Thus the logic that governs their practice is not only educational, but also market-related.

The publishers work under extremely tight time deadlines, which are set by the Department of Education. They also work to guiding criteria that the Department uses to assess all textbooks.<sup>1</sup> The first criterion is whether the learning outcomes and assessment standards have been covered. Other criteria deal with learning activities and assessment, which must be derived from the learning outcomes and assessment standards in the curriculum documents, and need to target different levels of complexity and be appropriately scaffolded. This concept ‘scaffolded’ is not explained in the official criteria, but would probably mean that learners are given sufficient

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<sup>1</sup> When publishers were interviewed publishers for this study in 2005, all textbooks had to be submitted to evaluation panels in each province for approval. This procedure changed after 2006. All books are now submitted to one national evaluation panel.

support in order to complete the tasks. There are five criteria for the subject-specific focus on history. The first criterion is that the textbook enables learners to engage with and analyse historical sources. The others include that all sources must be acknowledged, that topics be framed using key questions, that organising themes are recognisable, and that the volume of content is appropriate. Bias, ideology, the constructed nature of history and values are not mentioned at all.

In the early 1980s it was fashionable to use the work of Althusser to examine how history textbooks function as part of the ideological apparatus (Chisholm 1981). In a similar vein, a UNESCO study of 11 official history textbooks showed that they legitimated the social order of apartheid through pervasive ethnocentrism, the glorification of nationalism, the presentation of the past as a model for the present, the presentation of the historically contingent as natural and inevitable, the perpetuation of myths, the discrediting of counter-ideologies, the assumption of black incompetence and racism and stereotyping (Dean, Hartmann and Katzen 1983).

The Department of Education does not appear to be asking these or related questions about the new crop of textbooks. The departmental criteria do not ask if the new textbooks ‘perpetuate myths or glorify nationalism’. These kinds of questions were asked of textbooks in an audit commissioned by the South African History Project of textbooks being used in schools in 2002. The questions used in the audit specifically interrogated how African and South African history is represented. Examples of questions asked are: Are independence struggles and post-colonial problems presented as if all African countries experienced the same problems in the same way? Is black urbanisation represented as if it were purely voluntary? Is the gold mining industry presented only in a positive light? (Kros 2002). However, this report does not appear to have informed the departmental criteria for textbooks in 2006.

The Department of Education seems to be more interested in whether the new textbooks ‘look modern’ (to use Fuller, 1991, in a different context) in that they have a range of sources and activities and cover the learning outcomes and assessment standards, rather than looking substantively at their content. While obviously various textbooks embody substantive history knowledge to different degrees, it appears that procedural knowledge is key.

### **The field of reproduction**

In the field of reproduction, teachers interpret the message of the curriculum in their pedagogic and assessment practices. This is the most multi-layered field to analyse, firstly because pedagogy and assessment are hugely complex practices (Shulman 1986) and secondly because each teacher will interpret and recontextualise the curriculum in different ways, depending on their own experience, expertise, professional identity and the particular school context in which they teach (Cohen and Ball 1990).

This article presents case studies of three Grade 10 history teachers in three differently resourced high schools in KwaZulu-Natal. Under apartheid, South African schools were racially segregated and were differentially funded. Although now children may attend any school that they can afford to, schools still differ in terms of resources and the diversity of the student body. Lincoln is a well-resourced suburban school that used to serve only white children, North Hill is adequately resourced and previously served only Indian children, and Enthabeni is the least-resourced school and situated in a rural area. All are functioning schools that achieve Senior Certificate pass rates of between 85% and 100%. The school and teachers' names are pseudonyms. The teachers were observed for five consecutive lessons in 2005 and again in 2006, which was the year that the new curriculum was introduced. These teachers can only represent themselves.

### **Pedagogy**

At Lincoln and North Hill, the same teachers could be tracked over 2005 and 2006. At Enthabeni, two different Grade 10 teachers were observed during the two years, so it was not possible to make any observations regarding how pedagogy changed with the new curriculum. It is possible to conclude that the pedagogic practice of Mrs Lawrence at Lincoln and Mrs Naidoo at North Hill did not shift much when the new curriculum was implemented and there was little change in the way that the teachers presented and ordered history knowledge.

Mrs Lawrence showed a strong focus on developing both narrative and broad conceptual understanding in both years. Her emphasis was on developing substantive conceptual knowledge. She did this by emphasising the meaning of concepts (such as 'social mobility' and 'moral decay') and how they were linked across topics. For example, when discussing the issue of sabotage and the Luddites in industrialising Britain, she asked learners to think of other acts of sabotage in different historical times and places. While the learners did do some group tasks, these were general in nature (e.g. discussions focusing on the advantages and disadvantages of economic systems) and not particularly focused on the procedural knowledge of interrogating sources.

In both years, Mrs Naidoo's learners did a lot of group work, which usually involved reading texts, answering questions in groups and then reporting back to the class. On two occasions the report-backs given by the learners were poor, which meant Mrs Naidoo had to cover the material again, using a focused question-and-answer technique. There was some emphasis on her learners working with sources, but questions tended to be of the comprehension type, rather than of a historical procedural nature. There was no interrogation of the source from a historical perspective. For example, when looking at the income and expenditure of Louis XVI, the learners simply interrogated the figures, they did not think about them as a historical source.

At Enthabeni, Mrs Shandu in 2006 taught using a new curriculum textbook. She

relied on this textbook fairly heavily, giving learners activities to do that were in the textbook and reading aloud from it. She tended to translate much of the text into isiZulu, to make it comprehensible for her learners. There were no tasks where the learners actually engaged with history sources during the five lessons that I observed. They did what was essentially a comprehension exercise, using the textbook as a text. In this classroom, it did not appear that deep conceptual knowledge was being developed, nor was there a focus on the procedural knowledge that underpins the discipline.

In both 2005 and 2006, the cognitive demands of the questions that teachers asked their learners were highest at Lincoln, then at North Hill and lowest at Enthabeni. All the questions asked in the class by learners and teachers were coded using the criteria provided by Bloom's Revised Taxonomy (Anderson 2005). Lincoln was the only school where the teacher asked a significant number of higher-order questions and where a significant number of learners asked instructional questions. The regulative discourse was such that questions were welcomed and affirmed. In the other two classrooms the learners asked almost no instructional questions at all and there was very little real dialogue.

It is possible to see that in these three classrooms, substantive knowledge is developed to varying degrees. All three teachers were working to develop learners' sense of narrative and chronology. This was a particular challenge for Mrs Naidoo and Mrs Shandu, where many learners' competence in English was poor. There was some evidence of learners engaging with history sources in the Lincoln and North Hill classrooms, but none at Enthabeni. However, the sources were presented simply as history information; they were not interrogated as historical documents requiring questions about who wrote them and why, possible bias, why this piece of evidence has survived and other pieces have not, and so on.

### **Assessment**

While pedagogic practice did not shift, there was a noticeable shift in assessment practices between 2005 and 2006 at North Hill and Lincoln. Teachers at both these schools had used sources in their tests in 2005, and continued to do so in 2006. They both followed the guidelines set out by the official assessment documents in 2006. These were that tests would be framed by a key question, consist of a range of sources and questions based on these sources, and include an extended writing piece (Department of Education 2007). The cognitive demands of the North Hill tests increased in 2006, while decreasing at Lincoln. At Enthabeni, Mrs Shandu seemed unaware of many of the requirements of the new curriculum. In 2006, her tests did not meet the source-based requirements of the official documents, but her learners did write the Department of Education exemplar examination paper at the end of the year. Thus change appears to take place quite quickly (within a year) at the level of

formal assessment, whereas there is very little change at the level of pedagogy, knowledge ordering and informal assessment in the classroom. This may be because tests and examinations are more amenable to external monitoring and scrutiny from the Department of Education than are classroom practices.

In an analysis of a range of tests from these schools, and of the departmental exemplar examination in 2006, it became clear that learners were most often engaging with historical sources as comprehension exercises. In very few instances were learners required to engage with the sources as historical documents, i.e. to evaluate the usefulness of the source, to analyse any bias, to 'read between the lines', to think about the purpose for which it was produced, etc. Learners were seldom required to think about the constructed nature of history and to interrogate the sources as historians would. Thus even though the tests look as though they are source-based, and thus have the procedural dimension of history, in fact many are not. However, the tests also do not require learners to demonstrate much of the substantive knowledge dimension of history. In fact, most of the test questions could be answered using information provided in the sources given (Bertram 2008b).

### **Tracking the recontextualised message**

Using the fields of the pedagogic device as a structuring framework gives us a useful description of how the official message shifts and changes in these different fields. It underlines the fact that no curriculum reform is implemented in a linear way. The recontextualising of the FET history curriculum message may be tracked in tabular form as in Table 2.

At the level of the field of production, procedural and substantive knowledge are inter-twined. It is clear that both these aspects are critical to the practice of being a historian. At the level of the ORF, the curriculum document comprises both these aspects too. However, the nature of an outcomes-based curriculum means that the amount of space allocated to descriptions of the learning outcomes and assessment standards is greater than the knowledge dimension. The outcomes necessarily describe the skills that learners need to develop, but not the substantive knowledge. At the level of the PRF, the teacher training workshop that was observed had a very strong emphasis on 'covering' the assessment standards. A similar trend is seen in the list of criteria for textbooks developed by the Department of Education.

In the three classrooms that were observed, the emphasis placed on substantive knowledge and procedural knowledge varied. However, in the assessment tasks from these three schools, it becomes clear that the procedural dimension is emphasised. Often, however, what *looked* like history source-based questions were simply comprehension exercises. Learners were not required to demonstrate any substantive history knowledge, or that they in fact know *how to know history* (Seixas 1999).

**Table 2: Tracking the history curriculum through the fields of the pedagogic device**

Field of practice	Agents	Findings of this study
Field of production	Academics	Substantive knowledge and procedural knowledge = a historical gaze
Field of production	Curriculum writers	The curriculum comprises both substantive and procedural knowledge Strong focus on assessment and constitutional values
Pedagogic recontextualising field	Teacher trainers, textbook writers	Textbooks and teacher training had a strong focus on procedural knowledge (source-based tasks)
Field of reproduction	Teachers' pedagogical and assessment practices	Pedagogy: Substantive knowledge foregrounded Assessment tasks: Strong focus on the form but not substance of procedural knowledge; substantive knowledge appears to be backgrounded

**Conclusion**

History curriculum reformers in South Africa have embraced the procedural dimension of ‘doing history’. The aim of this focus on enquiry skills is to develop learners’ critical thinking and an awareness of how history is biased and ideologically informed, rather than an irrefutable ‘truth’, which is how Afrikaner nationalism was presented during apartheid. This focus on procedural knowledge, of learning how to know history, fits well with an outcomes-based system.

The tensions inherent in South Africa’s outcomes-based reform path have been well documented. Kraak (1999: 38) has described the tension as ‘a learning methodology which is simultaneously radical in discursive practice but behaviouralist in assessment technology’. This case study warns of the possibility that assessment technology will triumph. It appears that some teachers are heeding the official requirements to design tests to meet the assessment standards. But when these assessment standards are understood in technicist ways, assessment tasks can give the appearance of testing historical procedural knowledge while in fact assessing generic comprehension and reading skills.

It has been argued that history as a discipline has both a substantive knowledge dimension and a procedural dimension. Historians draw on both a depth of conceptual knowledge and a particular method of interrogating sources, asking questions, locating sources within their particular time and context and using evidence to build up a particular case or argument. As the message is tracked through the pedagogic

device, the relationship between the procedural dimension and the knowledge dimension shifts and changes. Particularly in the assessment tasks, the procedural dimension begins to take precedence over the knowledge dimension. Since evaluation condenses the entire pedagogic device (Bernstein 1996), the implication is that learners may be assessed on generic comprehension skills rather than on the substantive and procedural knowledge that makes history a specialised discipline.

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# Towards a definition of protocols when embedding the national and the civic in a history curriculum

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## Abstract

The tension between scholarship and exceptionalism in the relationship between the state, teachers in schools and those who work solely within the parent discipline of history is a universal problem. The promotion of national identity through the history curriculum is fraught with difficulties, but relates to (a) how a nation sees itself, especially in relation to its neighbours and the rest of the world, and (b) how a nation sees its educators (at all levels) on a compliance-autonomy continuum. If exceptionalism and compliance define the history curriculum and the relationship of teachers with it, then the result is in many ways unsatisfactory. On the other hand, if a nation's own history in a regional and global frame is offered as a space where debate and dialogue are ongoing between academics and teachers, and this is underpinned by a recognition that quality in subject knowledge is more about developing a sophisticated set of syntactic, substantive and pedagogic knowledge bases, then the dangers presented by an exceptionalist curriculum taught by politically compliant teachers will be far less likely to occur. The relationships between (a) and (b) at school, university and political levels have in common the need to create an open and empowering dialogic space where there is a free flow of ideas that tap into the idea of a universal community of teachers and academics and where up-to-date subject knowledge is supported, e.g. through web-based solutions, using filmed debate and discussion between historians.

Another set of arguments cluster around the kinds of narratives that a curriculum might seek to embed and embrace. The place of civil or civic society as defined in issues of human rights and civic responsibilities can be mirrored in narratives of civil government and civil society. But is this yet another form of exceptionalism? Is it a necessary and justifiable form of exceptionalism combined with a necessary form of presentism? What protocols are needed to reduce the charge of exceptionalism?

**Key words:** History curriculum; parent discipline; exceptionalism; nationalism; presentism; compliance; autonomy; substantive, syntactic and pedagogic knowledge bases; dialogue; dialogic space; scholarship; sophistication; web-based solutions; hybridity; intercultural; cosmopolitan; civic identity

The debate about what makes a good history curriculum for any country focuses on both practical and ideological issues. The practical issues are about appropriate content and process as well as resource choices for different age groups, and how a subject that embeds complexity can be made available for all age groups. The ideological issues include how a nation sees itself, how it is seen, how it relates to the histories of its own localities and populations and to the histories of others in its region and ‘family’ of nations (if there is one, e.g. the Commonwealth), and the kind of two-way relationship it has with the histories of the rest of the world.

The first set of issues relates to clusters of discourse around the notion of ‘exceptionalism’, but the debate moves on to a consideration of whether having national issues as a centre of gravity is distorting the debate, indeed whether it has become a false priority in a world where hybridity, multicultural citizenship and intercultural understanding are becoming essential.

First, it is necessary to look at exceptionalism itself, and its significance. Of course, conflicts arise in relationships, between nations and between different ethnic, religious or political groups, not so much because of the differences between each party but because of the exceptionalism that one side feels about itself, and a failure to have any engagement at an empathetic level with the other side. Jörn Rüsen’s analysis of aspects of ethnocentricity as an element of European historical consciousness is a stern but enlighteningly perceptive critique of this kind of situation, one that might well be applied beyond Europe too. He lists three deadly sins:

1. Normative dualism of or Manicheism of values (where the positive and normative evaluation of one’s own history is set against the negative evaluation of the history of others)
2. Reprojective teleology (an unbroken continuity of one’s own development from origins to relevant projections of the future)
3. Temporal and spatial centralism (a clear location of one’s own positive development in the centre of history and the corresponding discriminating marginalization of others) (Rüsen in MacDonald 2000: 81)

In the same volume Joke Van der Leeuw (whose career has been closely associated with Netherlands-based Euroclio and a mission to take intercultural understanding to conflict zones) reaffirms this view:

The wish to develop a national consciousness of the past also entails a third problem. The building of such consciousness is very much based on those elements that made the nation or state unique, rather than on those elements which were shared with neighbours or other nations. As a consequence, pupils were and are taught about national particularities, even though these may in fact be regional or even global experiences. (Van der Leeuw in MacDonald 2000: 116)

Exceptionalism is also a historical factor when evaluating the course of events. The clash between German and Soviet as well as Japanese and Chinese exceptionalisms in

the 1940s had the consequence of globalising a conflict. British exceptionalism has also been a factor in world events, sometimes involving conflict. Indeed, the current world situation is about conflicting and competing exceptionalisms in the West and in the Middle East, often with a strong element of indigenous self-determination set against what is perceived alternatively either as a legitimate right to intervene to protect national or Western interests or as colonialist or even imperial interference in the internal affairs of others. There are other factors such as liberalism versus conservatism, with proponents of each position claiming an exceptional case. Perhaps the most contested set of determinants is about how each side sees the meaning of 'civic society' in its own way. In some societies there would be a great reluctance to replace a revered local head person with a majority-elected representative, though the two perspectives can be fused together.

At its best exceptionalism is recognition of distinctiveness; at its worse it is underpinned by an exclusive sense of superiority that defines and inevitably damages relationships with others. Of course this is an oversimplification, because historians can argue that individuals from certain nations were the first to complete certain achievements in science, medicine, warfare, industry, architecture, art or sport. Similarly, certain nations might have been the first to make use of a distinctive political system. What may be more fruitful is to look at how certain developments, inventions or achievements were co-experienced across vast tracts of land or even in different continents. This makes use of a more anthropological and less competitive approach. This is in so many ways mirrored in the very art of conversation where listening is seen as courtesy and boasting is not. Among historians the use of MacIntyre's (1996) notion of 'universities of constrained disagreement' as exemplars of constructive dialogue can characterise a liberal humanitarian form of higher education anywhere in the world. A South African example of this is the statement by Verne Harris, archivist for the Nelson Mandela Centre of Memory, in a BBC 2 television programme *Mandela at 90* broadcast in the UK on 31 January 2009, that he wanted the archive to reflect not only multiple narratives but complexity and contestation. He did not want the Mandela myth to become the orthodoxy. This is a remarkably frank example of thinking that goes beyond and challenges exceptionalism.

An exceptionalist national history curriculum is much more likely to be taught in a didactic manner, using transmission modes of teaching where history is regarded as information. However, a curriculum structure based on a more professionally autonomous teaching model would have the virtue of having in-built resistance to the kind of political interference that depends on an uncritically compliant teaching workforce. This is why a nation needs not only freedom of dialogue between its historians but also a two-way relationship between teachers and historians and a creative and accessible facility to empower teachers to strengthen an autonomous knowledge base that not only embeds the debates of historians, but also has ways of transforming this into suitable modes of pedagogy.

Nevertheless, despite the perception that exceptionalism is almost always not good history, as a concept it can make a useful organising structure. The work of New Zealand historian Miles Fairburn (1994) uses the word. He seeks to define the factors that made New Zealand society different, including a tendency to look to the USA rather than Britain for cultural stimulus. Jonathan Clark (2003) openly assesses the role of exceptionalism in late 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century developments in England and in what became the United States of America. He sees the USA as having received a baton of political exceptionalism from the political sages who achieved the so-called Glorious or Bloodless Revolution in London in 1688-9. Every nation will tend to see its own history as having been special. It is complicated by the various levels that a sense of belonging can bring with it, including first (and subsequent) generation citizenship as well the implications of serving the country in the armed forces. Where people are asked to put themselves at risk for the sake of the nation, there often follows an emotional commitment to what is perceived as its shared values, and the nation takes on a mythic significance. Essentially this situation requires a set of beliefs about the country that will confirm that the nation is worth dying for, which it might be argued is preferable in those circumstances to seeing it as a false and ethnically-defined post-colonial construct. Giselle Byrnes, in a Dominion Day Symposium address (2007) organised by the New Zealand Government, reflects many relevant concerns, including an awareness that there are problems related to exceptionalism and particular views about national identity. The appeal for multiple narratives and interpretations and the adoption of a transnational approach would also all seem to make sense.

The book (the *New Oxford History of New Zealand*) therefore probes whether national identity still offers a useful way of explaining New Zealand history and asks if narratives which rely on the 'colony-to-nation' storyline are still relevant in the early twenty-first century. Second, contributors to this book question the notion that New Zealand's history is 'unique', distinct or exceptional, and considers the ways in which events in New Zealand can be understood as a part of trends, practices and structures that are linked to other places, far beyond these physical shores.[12] It questions the extent to which many aspects of New Zealand life, culture, political activity, economic and social trends were particular to New Zealand, and the degree to which they were part of a much larger canvas. Accordingly, the 'New Oxford History' responds to a recent challenge to re-imagine New Zealand's multiple pasts, to reconsider 'the world in New Zealand, rather than New Zealand in the world'.[13] It takes a transnational approach to history which focuses on the shared ties and common features across, above and beyond national boundaries.[14] (Byrnes 2007; footnotes readable in reference)

Nevertheless, there is not a simple formula here, because the continuing impasse over the place of history in the New Zealand Social Studies curriculum reveals an identity crisis that has something to do with an intellectual inability to reconcile 'colonial' and 'post-colonial' discourse with thinking about the development and status of a modern liberal state. Whereas a Social Studies curriculum with clear advice on content can exist in post-apartheid South Africa, New Zealand – it would seem – is still so guilt-ridden and confused about its past that only history specialist seniors are trusted with anything approaching a history curriculum. The two recent television series 'The New Zealand Wars' (James Belich presenting the narratives and interpretations of his

1986 book on the Maori Wars) and the series with the same name as the 2005 book by Dalley and MacLean, 'Frontier of Dreams' (although sadly not yet available in DVD format), as well as the overwhelming success of the late Michael King's *Penguin History of New Zealand* show that there is popular interest in history. New Zealand and South Africa have many common features, though there are also considerable differences between the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of the 1990s and New Zealand's Waitangi Tribunal (1975, 1985). The fact that some aspects of Maori history have attained quasi-legal status because they have been written or used for Tribunal compensation claims makes the kind of 'closure' required by a certain species of academic history impossible, though of course no debate on any history is ever really closed. A funded academic research project to record, fuse and synthesise Maori histories is much needed even if only as a necessary condition for a national curriculum that starts with a younger age-group.

It might be easier to see if greater clarity can be achieved by breaking exceptionalism down into categories. There are various forms of exceptionalism that can dog attempts to have an outward-looking history curriculum that has a degree of honest self-awareness. Among these are the following forms: (i) competitive; (ii) 'pure' civic and/or political; (iii) religious and/or cultural; and (iv) mythic. See the appendix for further notes on these. These in their different ways privilege aspects of a nation's or a group's histories, claiming either a 'first' or other forms of superiority. Of course there are flaws in the thinking behind these categories, especially because a history curriculum is taught in the real world and its original structure is constructed by real people. In fact it is in the very construction of a history curriculum that exceptionalisms can creep in, almost unseen. Then there is the antithesis of exceptionalism – intercultural hybridity and a more robust form of civic identity. The work of Leonie Sandercock (2003) throws a particularly perceptive light on these issues. She examines the possibility of a redefinition of identity and nation. She sees a new cosmopolitan kind of nation is 'as a space of travelling cultures and peoples with varying degrees and geographies of attachment'.

A more robust sense of identity, as outlined by Yasmin Alibhai-Brown or Salman Rushdie, must be able to embrace cultural autonomy and, at the same time, work to strengthen intercultural solidarity. If one dimension of such a cultural pluralism is a concern with reconciling old and new identities by accepting the inevitability of 'hybridity', or 'mongrelization', then another is the commitment to actively contest what is to be valued across diverse cultures. Thus Alibhai-Brown feels 'under no obligation to bring my daughter and son up to drink themselves to death in a pub for a laugh', nor does she want to see young Asian and Muslim women imprisoned in 'high-pressure ghettos ... in the name of "culture", a culture that forces obedience to patriarchal authority and arranged marriages' (Alibhai-Brown, 2001). Negotiating new identities then becomes central to daily social and spatial practices, as newcomers assert their rights to the city, to make a home for themselves, to occupy and transform space. (Sandercock, 2003: 98)

Drawing on the work of Amin and Gilroy, Sandercock continues by proposing the 'ideals of citizenship, democracy and political community' as the way to reach a balance between plurality, hybridity and egalitarianism.

The crucial implication of this discussion is that in order to enable all citizens, regardless of 'race' or ethnicity or any other cultural criteria, to become equal members of the nation and contribute to an evolving national identity, 'the ethnic moorings of national belonging need to be exposed and replaced by criteria that have nothing to do with whiteness' (Amin 2002: 22). Or as Gilroy (2000: 328) puts it, 'the racial ontology of sovereign territory' needs to be recognized and contested. This requires an imagination that conceives the nation as a space of travelling cultures and peoples with varying degrees and geographies of attachment. Such a move must insist that race and ethnicity are taken out of the definition of national identity and national belonging 'and replaced by ideals of citizenship, democracy and political community' (Amin 2002: 23). (Sandercock 2003: 100)

In another work by Gilroy (*The Black Atlantic*, 1993) he explores the notion of hybrid identity in terms of multiple consciousnesses (or in the case of the Atlantic used for slavery, the double consciousness of being both slave and an African). What are the implications of these suggestions for curriculum contexts? The only problem with Sandercock's vision is that it may not give enough recognition to the emotional aspect of belonging, to the clearly important nostalgic element. A nation may very well be seen by newcomers as merely a space, but for those who have lived there for generations it will undoubtedly have a special quality. For settlers and their descendants in for example South Africa, New Zealand, Canada, Australia and the USA, links with the 'home country' (e.g. Britain or other European countries) will be emotional. For indigenous groups there will be emotional attachments to traditions, some of which are deeply psychological. For Maori this is defined in the concept of *tangata whenua*, 'people of the land', where *whenua* also means afterbirth (see John Rangihau's (1992) 'Being Maori'). The nostalgia or even 'metanostalgia' (Guyver, 2008) that attends national curriculum debates almost like a spectre at the feast is like a hidden and often unnamed form of exceptionalism, and one that is difficult to identify and control.

Four recent studies highlight and examine the delicate political, pedagogical and historiographical relationships that characterise national curriculum initiatives and/or implementation in the context of four sets of nations (the USA, England and Wales, South Africa, and New Zealand) (Nash, Crabtree and Dunn, 1997; Phillips, 1998; Bertram, 2008; Sheehan, 2009). I must here confess my own involvement as a member of the DES National Curriculum History Working Group (1989–1990), during the period of whose deliberations I was a primary school teacher in a setting in south-west England. Is it possible to devise or deduce from these experiences a set of principles that embed good practice for national curriculum production, especially in the light of the blurring of national boundaries and globalisation?

The story told by Nash, Crabtree and Dunn is of a struggle to liberalise and globalise the history curriculum through a set of new National Standards against a background of neo-conservative opposition. (The National Standards Basic Edition 1996 are available online on the website of the National Centre for History in the Schools at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA): <http://nchs.ucla.edu/standards/>.) Neo-conservatives (who were opposed to the Standards) in this narrative certainly displayed many features of the exceptionalisms listed in (i) to (iii) above; indeed this

also touches on point (iv), as the view of American history of the opponents of the Standards in many ways gave US history a mythic status. It proved impossible to reconcile what Husbands, Kitson and Pendry (2003) have termed the 'great' and 'alternative' traditions in history. In US history the ethnic elements of both the indigenous population and the African American dimension alongside the histories of women and the less privileged would contribute to an 'alternative' tradition, as well as the ability to see US history in a wider global context. The attempt to get the so-called Standards accepted federally failed. The project lacked the legal and political structure that enabled the English and Welsh (and indeed the South African) initiative to gain enough acceptance to be effective, but this is not a valid criticism of a system where each state still has the power to control its schools. A further complication is that there seems to be little tradition in the USA of cooperation between historians and teachers of history, though the work in history teacher education of Sam Wineburg, Peter Seixas, Bruce VanSledright, Peter Stearns, Keith Barton and Linda Levstik (and the associated academic community of this research group) sits promisingly in the middle ground between the two.

Robert Phillips' analysis of the curriculum construction process in England and Wales (like Mark Sheehan's) is based on interviews with the proponents (including ministers and civil servants) and an engagement with the paper-chase of documentation (minutes, etc.). The picture that emerges is of a partially flawed but in some ways successful compromise not only between liberal and conservative elements, but also between the similarly ideological interpretations of history as process and history as content. The involvement in the debate of the Historical Association and the Royal Historical Society and, as a result, of history teachers, history teacher educators and historians from a range of political and epistemological standpoints could be interpreted as having, to some extent, led to a judicious *via media* or a point where a species of consensus had been reached by recognising, synthesising and fusing the horizons of liberal and conservative. Phillips analyses some of this complexity (the Final Report referred to is the DES (1990) Final Report of the National Curriculum History Working Group).

But the Final Report was certainly not the product of one person, reminding us that policy texts 'do not have single identifiable authors' (Codd 1988: 239). The Final Report was inevitably a 'political compromise' (Dawson 1990: 18); a 'powerfully persuading' text, the product not only of a multiplicity of authors but also 'the varieties of advice that was variously sought, gratuitously offered or imposed' (Slater 1991: 10). In the words of Jenkins and Brickley (1991), the Final Report was the product of 'much deeper trends in society' (p. 8) which encouraged them to argue that although the HWG [History Working Group] was 'hand-picked', its recommendations were certainly not Thatcherite. In fact, by stressing 'diverse interpretations, cultural and ideological heterogeneity' (ibid, p. 9) the Final Report actually challenged the 'certainist' Thatcherite view of history. The Report, say Jenkins and Brickley, was a text not only full of 'unintended consequences' for teachers but also 'unintended opportunities'.

Slater (1991) expressed similar views when he observed that the Report recognised (Carr-like?) the 'variety of interpretations of the past, the value-judgements made in

selecting, or omitting, content (p. 20). On the other hand, he pointed to a tendency in the Final Report to encourage the (Eltonian?) view that 'there is an objective view of the past waiting to be seized and an historical truth acceptable to all historians' (p. 21). This, he said, was the product of a committee 'keen to provide opportunities to fly their conflicting flags'. This reminds us again that policy texts are, after all:

... inevitably addressed to a plurality of readers. Instead of searching for authorial intentions, perhaps the proper task of policy analysis is to examine the differing effects that documents have in the production of meaning by readers. (Codd 1988: 239)

This explains why Collicott (1990), in contrast to Jenkins and Brickey (1991) above, viewed the Final Report as 'assimilationist'. (Phillips 1998: 81).

Nevertheless, vociferous critics like Stephen Ball, embedding principles of the 'alternative' tradition as well as a post-structuralist position, noted the various kinds of exceptionalism still identifiable within the curriculum:

The links between past and present in restorationist history are very different from those of 'new history'. The 'past glories' approach serves the ideology of empire and nationalism. The blood, struggle, pain and mess of history is reworked into a litany of glories and victories, a retrospective and sentimental adjustment of the actual. This is what Foucault calls 'the struggle over popular memory'. In restorationist history Britain is to be at the centre of history, a benign and progressive influence upon the world, bearer of justice and civilization. The focus, taken up in National Curriculum documentation, is upon political, constitutional and military history rather than social or cultural. School history is envisioned as a poetics of power played out as a soap opera of kings, queens and courtiers, as spectacle and personality. Emotion, identification, remorse and empathy are to be excised and instead we have history as a reconstitutive moral force and as a celebration of oppression and violence (articulated via the recurring imperialist referent). (Ball 1994: 39)

Ball had not taken into account the possibility that a framework could also be interpreted in ways that would be more sympathetic to alternative histories, because the final curricula that emerged in 1991, 1995 and 1999 did not have the levels of prescribed detail that he assumes. Also, and by contrast, Keith Robbins, President of the Historical Association at the time that the curriculum was being written, argued strongly in favour of national history being placed at the core, but not as 'the centre of gravity', supporting the Government's own position. In fact, Keith Robbins promoted a much more complex view of Britain as four or even (after 1922) five nations (England, Wales, Scotland, Ireland and eventually Northern Ireland and Eire). The interplay between these national, regional or provincial units is seen by him and other historians (like Conrad Russell) as offering explanations of key events like the Civil War(s) of the 1640s and 1650s.

The business of determining what is 'essential' and what constitutes a 'balance' in terms of content is formidably difficult. Of course, content will not be the only thing that matters and there is no need to presuppose a fundamental clash between 'skills' and 'content'. For my present purposes, that aspect can be left on one side. The central problem is 'British history'. Some, though I am not among them, would deplore a return to any emphasis upon the national past as such. They would prefer the curriculum to have no core at all. However it is not to decry the importance of 'world history' to argue that an emphasis upon national history is proper. We may assert that pupils, as future citizens, should have an understanding of the evolution of their own country. In addition, it is arguably only by gaining a relatively detailed 'base' in one particular society that

pupils and adults can encounter other societies and cultures in a creative fashion. A syllabus that wanders across the globe but is anchored nowhere can leave a student with an inadequate feel for the peculiarities and distinctive qualities of any society. From a pedagogical standpoint, national history also has the conspicuous advantage that the visible traces of the past lie all around. A phrase in the interim report expresses the whole matter neatly, but perhaps not altogether clearly: 'We have placed British history at the core of our proposals, but that does not mean that it has to be the centre of gravity'. In its final report the Working Group would appear to have met the Secretary of State's request for an increased emphasis on British history. (Robbins 1990: 380-381)

Carol Bertram's study of the South African history curriculum can throw light on some of Ball's thinking. She looks at four aspects of the concept of recontextualisation alongside Bernstein's notions of vertical and horizontal discourse. The aspects are forms of regulation in the field of practice, and are: production of discourse, two different kinds of recontextualising fields (official and pedagogic), and the field of reproduction. Alongside these four fields are three corresponding set of rules: distributive rules (associated with the production of the discourse by academics), recontextualising rules (in the official and pedagogic recontextualising fields), and evaluative rules (in the field of reproduction).

Ball is setting up as an hypothesis that what appears to be the *official* recontextualising field will dominate all other forms of discourse, including the crucial level where a 'production' and 'distributive' agenda is set by historians themselves. In her study of the South African curriculum Bertram provides useful tools of analysis and shows in her examination of the various stages of the national curriculum process exemplars of the ways in which proposals and structures are accompanied by reactions and changes in continuing professional development of teachers.

His (Ivor Goodson's [1982]) main hypotheses emerging from this study [1982] are that subjects are not monolithic entities, but rather are shifting amalgamations of sub-groups and traditions; that in order to establish a school subject, subject groups tend to move from promoting pedagogic and utilitarian traditions towards the academic tradition, and that subjects in schools clash over status, resources and territory. In applying these ideas to history, it is clear that what constitutes school history shifts with time. School history is influenced by changes in the field of production, where history discourse is debated and made. History typically plays a role in constructing the national identity of a society, and so the content of history curricula usually change with significant political changes (Torsti 2007). What makes up school history is also different in different countries. There is no universal, monolithic and unchanging thing that is 'school history'. (Bertram 2008: 105-106)

One of Bertram's findings, indeed so important that it forms the final paragraph of her study, relates to the imbalance caused by the dominance of skills over content:

The study speaks to the fact that in a vertical knowledge discourse (the discourse of formal school knowledge), there cannot be skills without knowledge. As the message is recontextualised down to the field of reproduction, the procedural dimension of history is eclipsing the knowledge dimension, specifically in the written assessment tasks. This is largely due to the discourse of outcomes-based education which has dominated education reform for more than a decade. However, procedures and knowledge in vertical discourse cannot be separated. When they are, we get the appearance of 'doing history as historians do', but this is not 'history' unless it is underpinned by coherent, chronologically informed

understandings of the key events and narratives that have shaped our present. (Bertram 2008: 327)

She emphasises the importance for students to have teachers who know history, as a 'historical gaze' needs to be developed through both knowing and doing. Learners need to have the example of teachers who themselves can both know and do.

A slightly different emphasis comes from Linda Chisholm, whose paper stresses the positive contribution that the South African history curriculum makes to challenging nationalism and promoting a cosmopolitan notion of citizenship.

To all intents and purposes the official curriculum and history curriculum promote a cosmopolitan citizenship. The values of the constitution, recognition of the diversity of affiliations and identities provide the space for the teaching of values antithetical to xenophobia. A curriculum, however, is after all only the paper it is written on, and its practice as enacted through textbooks is now our focus. (Chisholm 2008: 363)

Mark Sheehan's critical examination of the process that led to the inclusion or exclusion of certain histories in New Zealand's senior school history curriculum of the 1980s shows how Tudor and Stuart (British) history and women's history were fully accepted but Maori history was only partially successful in gaining a place in the curriculum. His success criteria acting as a set of working hypotheses focused on whether or not an area of history had a strong existing network and a sufficiently effective voice not only among higher education circles but also in the 'elite' group making curriculum decisions. Here are his three criteria:

1. The decision-making elite share the view that a particular body of knowledge is of higher status and more important than any alternative.
2. The initiative is located within the existing orthodoxy of the parent discipline and shares the existing scholarly constraints and boundaries of the discipline.
3. Advocates for the initiative establish alliances with major stakeholders in a subject community who are sympathetic to their cause. (Sheehan 2009: 27)

Sheehan describes the irony of a situation that is reflected by the anomaly of Tudor and Stuart history maintaining its popularity in schools while declining in popularity and significance in New Zealand's universities. One tentative explanation draws on the work of one of New Zealand's leading historians, James Belich, whose major theoretical perspective on 20<sup>th</sup> century New Zealand history is 'recolonisation'.

Belich's view is that New Zealand's own history in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries is of sufficient interest to adolescents (e.g. the violence of its internal wars and the sexual dimensions of early settlement and encounters) that its place in the curriculum needs to be re-evaluated (see Belich's work 1986, 1996, 2001, 2007, and his criticism of New Zealand school history in Catherall 2002a and 2002b). The rather artificial end-date of Tudor and Stuart studies is set at 1667, and the argument that an understanding of political change in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries is essential for an awareness of how politics in New Zealand developed seems flawed when the curriculum neglects other European and worldwide developments (e.g. Empire and Enlightenment) between the reign of Charles II and the first footfalls of *Pakeha* (mainly European non-Maori New

Zealanders) in New Zealand in the late 1760s.

The position of Maori history is complex but, viewed within the bigger picture of developments in the parent discipline of history and corresponding developments in the history curriculum, might be seen to fall into Husbands et al.'s (2003) category of 'alternative' history. However, in the light of the Treaty of Waitangi (1840), New Zealand's founding document, Maori history would seem to claim a right to have a special and protected status using the meaning of *taonga* within the Treaty text, as Maori history within the broader category of 'treasured possession'. However, the strong oral tradition and rivalry between *iwi* (tribes) and *hapu* (sub-tribes) make the transformation of Maori histories into a publicly accessible format problematic, a situation exacerbated by an apparent but perhaps now redeemable lack of trust between Maori and non-Maori historians (e.g. the late historian and journalist Michael King was criticised for some aspects of his Maori histories). Nevertheless, the existence of a subject community of university-based Maori historians, *Te Pouhere Korero* (Maori Historians' Network), offers some hope for resolving this situation.

What lessons can be learnt from these various experiences? The first would seem to be that in any country there is a need for strong sets of relationships between the three communities of historians, history teacher educators and teachers. Indeed this needs to be encouraged by the government. In the four sets of countries under consideration, the USA would appear to lack a strong relationship between historians and the other two groups, though the other groups are strong. In South Africa historians like Albert Grundlingh, Jeff Guy, Christopher Saunders, and Yona Seleti were involved in the curriculum debate that led to a national curriculum within a Social Studies framework where a strongly South African and African focus was embedded. The involvement of the history teacher education sector (see Siebörger 2000, 2005) and the local advisory service (see Siebörger, Weldon and Dean 2004) was significant, especially given that these history teacher educators and local advisers were already part of an international nexus of history curriculum specialists, well-placed to get a syntactic and substantive balance set in the context of wider debates about history pedagogy. It might be asked whether the concerns articulated by Byrnes and Sandercock (above) about intercultural and global dimensions are sufficiently reflected in the curriculum. Chisholm (2008) believes that they are, and that the strong framework useful to enable teachers to encourage the cosmopolitan is there, though its full use may have to be a focus for future research. One concern does seem to relate to outcomes-based education and getting the balance right: the detailed calibration and atomisation of skills and conceptual understanding on the one hand and a deepening substantive knowledge base on the other (Bertram 2008: 327).

According to Sheehan in New Zealand, an 'elite' group of historians privileged certain histories that met criteria concerned with professional interests and existing networks and HE representation. Partly as a result of this and because of the problematic status of Maori history, a full engagement with New Zealand history looked difficult

compared with the more straightforward engagement with the highly resourced Tudor and Stuart British history unit. In England and Wales if not the 'certainist' then the perceived 'Eltonian' nature of British history that seemed to emerge from the curriculum debates was challenged by critics both inside and outside the university sector. However, as in South Africa and indeed in New Zealand, in England and Wales there are strong communities of historians, history teacher educators and teachers, with the Historical Association embracing all three.

The second lesson would seem to be that the multiple narratives and contested nature of some if not all histories are elements that need to be embedded in the curriculum. The so-called PESC formula that was discussed by the History Working Group in England implied an acceptance that political, economic (as well as technological and scientific), social and cultural (and religious) dimensions would also be included.

The third and related lesson is that history is about syntactic as well as substantive understandings. Syntactic, substantive and pedagogic knowledge bases need to be sophisticated if teachers are to be truly effective. Where the pedagogic knowledge base is itself based on recognising that history is construct and can be taught and learnt using constructive methods, there is a suitable coherence and elision between the bases (Guyver 2003; Guyver and Nichol 2004).

Indeed, if a Utopia were possible, then in this ideal world the discourses of historians would be mirrored by corresponding debates and discussions in schools and classrooms. Here historical knowledge and understanding could be co-constructed between teachers and students and the Internet used with film, text and interaction could be available for teachers to maintain a dialogue with both historians and subject-specific pedagogues. Such a website could be maintained with historians making contributions in text and film, with subject knowledge updates placed regularly on the site.

The fourth lesson is that the embedding of the civic is an exceptionalism that presents a dilemma, for while on the one hand it is both justifiable and unavoidable, on the other it needs to be set in a frame of all of the other exceptionalisms. The starting point for a history curriculum is the status quo of the state and its government. This is also an inevitable and excusable, but nevertheless potentially dangerous, presentism. In South Africa the civic present is a comfort zone. In New Zealand it is a zone without comfort, though for a variety of reasons. The existing civic situation, including legislation on human rights and support for democratic, representative and participatory processes, is a prism through which the past will inevitably be seen by teachers, parents and students. The current position of various groups, including indigenous groups, in this will affect the ways in which their histories are seen. There is a tension between views of the modern liberal state and post-colonial or even recolonial interpretations, between views of soft power and hard power even within a Commonwealth situation. This amounts to an identity crisis, which is affecting relations with other influential nations. Recently Neil MacGregor, Director of the British Museum, made these comments in the context of a forthcoming exhibition on the history of Iran (Shah

Abbas – The Remaking of Iran, 19 Feb-14 June):

The British are very naive about the acquisition – and loss – of power; we have a sort of amnesia about how we lost our empire. ... We grew up with the stability of American and Soviet empires and we are now seeing the rise of China, Russia and India. Our ignorance of other empires was part of our political project of supremacy, but it is now crippling our capacity to manage our relations with the countries over which we once established that supremacy. Iran has never been able to be naive about power, given its geostrategic significance in central and western Asia. Under Abbas, it became adept at using soft power. (Bunting 2009)

Indeed, if soft power is now what is needed, the history curriculum is a way to achieve it. The implications of these comments are that the acquisition, the exercise and ultimately the loss of hard power and its transformation into soft power are matters for the historical record and not necessarily for psychological anguish. The perceived superiority of our own forms of government must not stop us from examining the development of other powerful nations. To do this without prejudice is difficult, but historical method and the processes and procedures of the history curriculum can help. Above all it is necessary to get ‘inside the event’ (Collingwood 1946), ignoring or at least recognising our own exceptionalisms, and seeking to use an ‘historical gaze’ and hear the contemporary voice through the records. The corresponding benefits in pedagogical terms are the sense of ownership and empowerment that follows the internalisation and transformation of knowledge. The benefits in political terms are that diplomats, politicians and indeed travellers of all kinds might be more able to enter into eirenic conversations on equal terms. Nevertheless there is still mileage in understanding the political systems and historical development of the place of residence, and as Robbins (1990) suggested there is no reason why this cannot be used as a template to understand other systems and cultures, bearing in mind that enabling the leap to understand difference is one of the most significant lessons that a history curriculum can teach.

## **Appendix: Types of exceptionalism**

1. *Competitive exceptionalism* – tending to view a history of the unit being studied in terms of who did what first or best (e.g. locating the source of the Industrial Revolution in Britain). Another feature of this is the denigration of the history of others in order to enhance the ‘home’ history.
2. *‘Pure’ civic and/or political exceptionalism* – linked with competitive exceptionalism and tending to privilege one kind of political system over another (e.g. viewing Western styles of democratic government as intrinsically superior to other forms or, from another perspective, viewing collective or even in some cases (and by contrast) nationalist forms of government as superior).
3. *Religious and/or cultural exceptionalism* – in a sense this does not have to be linked to macronarrative interpretations, as some religions have forms of exceptionalism

built into them, e.g. Jesus as the (only) Son of God or Messiah, belief in him as the only way to salvation, etc. Colonialism was in many ways a combination of this with the second form of exceptionalism.

4. *Mythic exceptionalism* – this raises the stakes and gives a national unit (e.g. a country or ‘territory’) or even a ruling elite within that unit a special and almost mystical status, often linked with forms 1, 2 and 3 above. Popper (1945) identified this as a pernicious form of tribalism that could even be found among the ruling classes of Greece at the time of Plato, and which Popper evaluated as being antithetical to the idea of an open society. Popper’s own experience of Nazi rule in Austria was a clear example.

5. Not so much a category as a transitional question. Can there be ‘justifiable’ civic and/or political exceptionalism when it is disciplined by certain historical protocols? The point of this is that all of the forms of exceptionalism above (1 to 4) are also ‘bad’ history, because the form of retrospective teleology also known as the Whig interpretation of history is now no longer regarded as acceptable by mainstream historians. Of course now there are other discourses (e.g. Foucault and Bourdieu) that cast a critical light on how society recontextualises its history for reasons of political control. It is worth considering whether it is impossible to avoid ideology in curriculum construction and similarly whether it is possible for teachers of history to steer the difficult and perilous middle course between Scylla, the devouring monster of Whiggism, and the many-channelled whirlpool of Charybdis eddying with the dangerous ideological cross-currents of field, habitus, doxa and socio-cultural capital.

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# 'Nobody says how people died of heartache!': Constructing a primary narrative in a pedagogical setting

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## Abstract

National and international literature on history education and regime change emphasises the importance of primary narratives in (re)establishing a democratic society. By telling and listening to primary narratives we not only include 'lost' or 'silent voices' in the historical record, but we (might) prevent atrocities from happening again. The primary witness, however, is mostly presented and treated as 'the Other', someone who has to be brought into the learning and teaching process. Moreover, an understanding of how a primary narrative is constructed and used in a pedagogical setting has not yet been established in existing literature. The article presents and analyses a case study in which a primary witness, working at a former HOR school in a supportive (not pedagogical) role, is brought in to guide Grade Nine learners in the area from which she had been forcibly removed during apartheid. The analysis suggests that we have to look further than the mere *presence* of primary narratives in history education, and study the pedagogical practice and approach to history that the teacher/facilitator (in this case a primary witness) employs. The latter includes primary narratives but also 'less organised' forms of positioning self and others in history.

It is a clear autumn day in Cape Town, April 2005. Eileen Meyer [a pseudonym], a woman in her early sixties, is walking with a group of Grade 9 learners through the area from which she had been forcibly removed during apartheid.

She counts the number of cottages in each street or road we passed already. Learners are taking note. 'Have you got it? ... everybody still writing?' She always gives them enough time to write. It seems to determine our pace. She spells the names of shops that were there. A boy tells her that the grandpa of a girl in Grade 11 lived in the area. EM points out a house where there was a shop; the man who owned the shop still has his business now in Retreat. 'Here is history now again', she says, pointing at the church where she was confirmed, married; where her children were confirmed, married, and where her

husband was buried out from last year. ‘Ok?’ I watch her saying this, she remains seemingly motionless while she waits till the learners have written this down. What does this make her feel? A boy asks her if she still attends here. She says her children sometimes do, cause they have a car. You need a car to get here, she explains, the church is empty Sunday mornings because people have to come from so far, from Mitchell’s Plain etc. ‘On the pavement. Careful there’s people that side.’ – ‘white’ people are passing us. [Researcher’s observation notes on first group]

Pointing out landmarks in the landscape and instructing the learners to take note, Eileen Meyer re-inscribes the area with shops and homes where (mostly) ‘coloured’ families live with ‘13 children in a two-bedroom house’. She draws playing children and ‘friendly’ gangsters onto the streets that presently bustle with ‘white’ inhabitants and business owners and ‘black’ workers and maids who pass by or – from a distance – stare at the flock of ‘coloured’ and ‘black’ children. A few greet the learners.

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This article problematises the role and use of primary narratives and their bearers in meeting the demands of the history curriculum for the inclusion of oral testimony in the recovery of silent or lost voices. By focusing on how Eileen Meyer, a victim of the apartheid policy of forced removals, is engaged as a primary witness with young post-apartheid learners, the article provides a taste of a multi-layered analysis of this emerging pedagogy.

### **The ‘never again imperative’ and the construction of primary narratives**

In South Africa, where the majority were treated as ‘foreigners’ under the apartheid regime, this kind of pedagogical interaction is important. The Department of Education (DOE) curriculum statement of 2002 urges educators to include ‘lost voices’ or ‘silent voices’ in history, by engaging the younger generation in oral history projects and in visits to heritage sites (DOE 2002: 4-6, 92-3).

The pedagogical importance of primary narratives, however, lies not only in ‘revising’ the historical record. Literature on oral history and history education in South Africa presents the sharing of primary narratives as something that needs to happen, in order *to prevent the atrocity from happening again* (Dryden 1999; Coombes 2003; Jeppie 2004; Naidu et al. 2007). Teachers too speak about this so-called ‘never again’ imperative. Lesley Adonis [a pseudonym], the Grade 9 teacher who asked Eileen Meyer to guide the learners, said the following:

Living memory is so short! You know, I, I don’t know, I find the memory of people are so short! But so short! (long pause) Ten years on people don’t remember (laughs). It’s scary, it’s so frightening, you know. That for me was also one of the issues why I thought the walk, because the question is, how do you make people remember? But not only remember (pause), that you don’t repeat the mistakes of the past. (long pause) I think there’re very few answers. But I think the one thing is through education. That is why I felt that the story must be told. And (long pause) that must be an oral history that is ongoing. So it’s passed down the generations. And in that way (pause) I don’t think you

can say 'never'. But it's more. When that history is not told, when the memory dims, it becomes easier to repeat the mistakes of the past. But when that is a LIVING history, when it is stories that are told down the generational line, then I think (pause) there is a greater possibility [that it won't happen again].

As is clear from Lesley Adonis's reflection, the 'never again' imperative remains an imperative; it does not guarantee a peaceful future. Internationally, researchers and primary witnesses of traumatic historical events similarly question the imperative (Simon 2005; Wiesel 2006). This awareness moves our attention beyond the mere *presence* of primary narratives in history education, to the question *how one constructs and uses* a primary narrative. In the context of the Holocaust, Elie Wiesel asks a daring question:

[I]s it perhaps our fault that the world remains unchanged? If two or three generations have ignored or rejected our message, could it be that it was poorly and inadequately handed down? Should we have chosen other words, another language to speak the unspeakable? (Wiesel 2006: 1)

Simon (2005) and Wiesel (2006) also argue that primary narratives are not innocent of context or motive. They point out an underlying danger: primary narratives can be used in order to remove or annihilate competing narratives and their bearers.

### **What lies beneath: The construction of primary narratives in post-apartheid South African history education**

The case-study on Eileen Meyer guiding three groups of Grade 9 learners is part of doctoral research that focused on how South African history Grade 9 teachers and museum facilitators of two Cape Town museums construct and use primary narratives when teaching the younger generation about apartheid and the Holocaust (Geschier 2008). The study made use of oral interviews, and classroom and museum observations. One of the conclusions drawn was that the challenge is situated beyond what kind of language or words the primary witnesses use. It does not suffice to study the presence of primary narratives in history education and their construction and use; one also needs to study the pedagogical practice of the person taking on the role of teacher/facilitator and his/her approach to history. Moreover, the analysis of the primary narratives needs to entail an investigation of 'less organised' forms of positioning self and others in history: teachers/facilitators often did not construct easily identifiable narratives, but they did position themselves and others, for example the learners and the learners' parents, in relation to history. These positionings of self and others in relation to history or, as Bruner (1996) would argue, 'the Past, Present and Possible' happened in a variety of ways, including regulative comments.

In contrast to the majority of the study's informants, Eileen Meyer was 'the odd one out'. There were two major differences from a 'normal' pedagogical interaction. Firstly, Eileen Meyer is not a trained teacher, but a custodian in a school that was administered by the House of Representatives (HOR) in apartheid times, restricted to admit-

ting 'coloured' learners. Secondly, the interaction took place outside a conventional pedagogical setting.

Another reason why Eileen Meyer was 'the odd one out' lies in the way in which she positioned herself and how she was positioned by others. The 26 Grade 9 teachers interviewed, seven of whom were observed in the classroom, spoke and acted primarily from their 'teacher' identity. They seemed to 'forget' their primary witness identity with regard to the apartheid regime. In contrast, Eileen Meyer, similarly to primary witnesses working at the District Six Museum and the Cape Town Holocaust Centre, foregrounded her primary witness identity and did not (or with difficulty) respond to questions focussing on the pedagogical interaction itself. Eileen Meyer, the teachers and the principal of the school treated this interaction as being 'different', with the primary witness being 'the other' who has to be brought into the educational process.

Why is this question around the construction of primary narratives and less organised positionings of self and others in history important? It has been 15 years since the first democratic elections in South Africa took place, and history is actively rewritten and negotiated while most of the primary witnesses are still alive.

The psychologist Bar-On (1999: 4) would argue that South Africa is a 'quasi-democratic' nation, a society that moved very quickly out of an oppressive regime. He argues that people do not merely change their identities and values as political or social changes occur (See also Halbwachs 1992: 21-22). The process of reconstructing identities and discourses of what is 'normal', 'describable' and 'discussable' in quasi-democratic societies is something not to be taken for granted because it is a process which unfolds in complex ways (Bar-On 1999: 253-291).

One can witness the complexity of this process of change and reconstruction in the treatment of primary witnesses and primary narratives in the official documents of the South African Department of Education. The national curriculum suggests both Nazi Germany and apartheid as topics in Grade 9. The focus is on learning outcomes around historical consciousness, citizenship and democracy (DOE 2002: 4-6 and 92-3).

From the perspective of an oral historian, the inclusion of these two topics is potentially rewarding for the process of popularising oral history. Both present real opportunities for providing substance to those interested in recovering oral testimony and using it in pedagogical interactions on the recent history of one's country. The revised curriculum for Grades R-9 indeed encourages the 'inclusion of lost voices' in history and encourages teachers to undertake oral history projects and visits to heritage sites. The Department, however, does not make explicit who these 'lost voices' (or 'silent voices') are, nor does it make a distinction between primary witnesses and primary narratives. It provides little insight into the theoretical debates and practical changes that have occurred in the literature on oral history and testimony (DOE 2002: 4-6 and 92-3; 2003: 29 and 36).

### **Witness identity and fostering change**

For the present study, it is important to point out that, as in the case of Eileen Meyer, the primary witness is often treated as ‘the Other’ in education, someone ‘from outside’ who has to be brought into the teaching and learning process. One easily forgets that the majority of the South African teachers have experienced apartheid first-hand in various ways, as teenagers, as adults/parents and even as people who may have taught during the tumultuous times of 1976 and the 1980s. Many teachers, moreover, have experience of being trained and socialised into history and history teaching in particular ways during that era. The curriculum seems to collude with this ‘forgetting’: It assumes that educators know how to achieve the prescribed outcomes through the inclusion of primary narratives, how to facilitate the learning process and, implicitly, how to bring about change. References to the role and influence of personal positions and experiences of the teacher on the learning process are rare (see also Harley et al. 2000; Goodson 1996; Harley and Wedekind 2003; Taylor 1999).

This is problematic for socio-historical and pedagogical reasons. Philosophers, narrative researchers and socio-cultural theorists point out the importance of paying attention to the construction of narratives by individuals and groups within a society. Identity – knowing who one is – is in the words of Taylor ‘to be oriented in moral space, a space in which questions arise about what is good or bad, what is worth doing and what not, what has meaning and importance for you and what is trivial and secondary’ (Taylor 1989: 28). We inescapably understand this moral orientation in the form of narratives (Taylor 1989: 50-52; Wertsch 2004: 49-50). In addition, LaCapra (2001: 91) states that ‘critically tested’ testimonies of events such as the Holocaust have a social role in the sense that they contribute to ‘a cognitively and ethically responsible public sphere’. While this argument seems to confirm the assumption of an uncomplicated intergenerational transmission of knowledge and values, it points to the importance of paying attention to the subjectivity of teachers/facilitators if we want to understand how people change, reflect on change and mediate this to younger generations.

In the field of education, Ellsworth (1997 and 2005), Jagodzinski (2002), Bruner (1996) and others (Kozulin et al. 2003; Britzman, 2000) also challenge an idealistic, unproblematic interpretation of change. Ellsworth (1997: 8) points out that pedagogy is ‘a much messier and more inconclusive affair than the vast majority of our educational theories and practices make it out to be’. Educators, and human beings in general, have the desire to forget that ‘the fancy of understanding’ is a prestigious but seductive illusion (Ellsworth 1997: 81-82; see also Britzman 2000; Chang 1996; Hooks 1994). Ellsworth explains:

Teaching is not psychoanalysis. But consciously or unconsciously teachers deal nevertheless in repression, denial, ignorance, resistance, fear and desire whenever we teach. And in any classroom, the presence of the discourse of the Other can often become painfully and disturbingly evident and ‘disruptive’ to goals such as understanding, empathy, communicative dialogue. This is especially so in classrooms that deal explicitly with histories (Ellsworth 1997: 70).

Internationally and locally, stakeholders within national and provincial departments of education, teachers and academics increasingly perceive museums as crucial educational sites that document and symbolise the transition, and facilitate the building of the future – or, in Bruner’s words, ‘the Possible’ (1996). Research on and acknowledgment of history classrooms as a site where this transition and the construction of collective memory also takes place, or *might* take place, is, however, minimal and, if present, mostly situated in First World countries (Stearns et al. 2000: 1-2; see also Bage 1999; Kuhn and McLellan 2006; Barton and Levstik 2004). Most research on history classrooms in South Africa focuses on learners’ perceptions, performance, the curriculum and learning outcomes (Bam 2001; Dryden 1999; Kros s.d. and 2000; Chisholm 2004 and 2005; Bundy 2007; Siebörger 2000; Legassick 2007; Taylor et al. 2003; Taylor and Vinjevd 1999). Research on transition and the classroom practice of history teachers as ‘an epistemological and cultural act’ (Stearns et al. 2000: 3) is limited (Dryden 1999; Coombes 2003; Jeppie 2004; Naidu et al. 2007).

Many history teachers, however, do instruct their learners to interview their parents, grandparents or neighbours about their experiences during apartheid. In addition, museums like the Cape Town Holocaust Centre and the District Six Museum actively involve primary witnesses in the development of the exhibitions and in the daily programmes offered to schools. This way of using primary witnesses, and the underlying assumption of a transmission of knowledge and values from one generation to another and learning from and transforming of the past, is, as explained above, well known, defended *and simultaneously* questioned by many.

So let us return to Eileen Meyer: She is brought into the pedagogical setting in the role of primary witness. What kind of narrative does she construct, and, underlying this, with what kind of pedagogical practice and approach to history does she engage? The latter will be addressed first.

### **An implicit pedagogy: The witness as educator and historian**

Even though she did not have formal training in teaching or in historical studies, Eileen Meyer established a specific and patterned pedagogical mode of interaction. It is likely that her experiences as a learner informed this. As is clear from the extract quoted, she focused mainly on, and regulated the pace according to, the learners’ note-taking of what she told them and of spatial markers, such as street names. One could typify this kind of pedagogical practice as being ‘repetition-led’ and the approach to history as being ‘factual’. Meyer’s practice focused mainly on routinely reproducing ‘the truth’ and positioned teacher and learners in specific roles in the pedagogical interaction, namely the teacher teaches the ‘best’ story ‘as the way it happened’, learners absorb and reproduce it. She foregrounded evaluation and control of bodies, movement and noise (Jacklin 2004: 150-156 and 178-200; Seixas 2000: 21-23). In addition, a factual approach to history, according to Seixas (2000: 21-23), ‘enhanc[es] collective memory’ and assists in providing identity, cohesion and social purpose.

While Lesley Adonis's reflection on the 'never again' imperative seems to resonate with the latter interpretation, the analysis below of Meyer's positioning of self and others in history seems to question an unproblematised, inclusive, 'we' group identity.

The pedagogical texts were encapsulated in Eileen Meyer's speech as well as her body language. She linguistically and bodily pointed out and marked the landscape of the area with shops and people that used to be there. She repeatedly checked if the learners had written down the 'facts' she had shared with them. Throughout her interaction, she told the learners to look up in books ('when you are at UCT') and to ask other people about this area and the forced removals. This instruction seemed to function as a truth-claim rather than a discipline-specific instruction to further the learners' knowledge and skills. In the same vein, she told the learners that they could now tell other people that they have seen and walked through the area. The learners asked mainly 'factual' questions, and often checked if their notes were 'correct'. One of the accompanying teachers moved beyond the factual, asking questions relating to the experience of living in that era ('how was it like to live during that era?'), and some of the learners expressed empathy and surprise when Eileen Meyer spoke about her emotions. However, it is not clear if learners wrote down the latter. She often made regulative comments like 'move on, don't be inquisitive' (at a house where a piece of paper on the door read '... no jobs! No money!') and 'Don't look, just walk. Don't look into windows'. These comments demarcate what she perceived as acceptable behaviour, but also the pedagogical text, i.e. not the inside of people's houses.

Some of the activities were more 'convention-led', being orientated towards the procedures of the discipline of history (Jacklin 2004: 144-150 and 168-177): Eileen Meyer asked the learners if they knew people who lived in the area and she asked them to define the Group Areas Act and forced removals, something that the learners had learnt about in class. Discipline-specific activities such as asking the guide critical questions, looking around/investigating, thinking about/linking back to what had been done in class were, however, rare and activities such as comparing different sources/voices were absent. The main role allocated to the learners was to listen and to take notes.

Eileen Meyer constructed her narrative mainly while standing at two buildings crucial to her story: her birth house and the church she attended. Standing at these buildings, her positioning of self *in history* was strong, most notably revealed by markers such as 'So now you have my history now' and 'Here is history again'. In her primary narrative, Eileen Meyer used iterative and generalised positionings using the constructions 'people would' and 'you would'. However, at certain points she seemed to bring in her own person and feelings more explicitly by talking about 'hurt', and '[being like] an uprooted tree'. She clearly struggled to express her emotions. During the second tour, she commented 'The saddest thing is: I show you around, and it brings out memories ... sad, hurt, I can't even tell.' At the end of that tour, Eileen Meyer asked the learners what they had learnt from her.

Teacher: 'I hoped you learnt something.'

'Thanks, Mrs Meyer,' the learners say.

EM asks, 'What did you learn? I want to know ... what can you tell me about what I told you?'

A female learner says that she learnt it was different compared to her own life, how they grew up.

A male learner says it changed a lot.

EM: 'Nobody says how people died of heartache!' She says she is disappointed that though everybody cooperated, a few were 'stupid' ([some boys had] pressed the bell [of a house in the area]). [Researcher's observation notes on second group]

The learners respond here from their position as secondary witnesses, having learnt that life in that time was different from life today. Eileen Meyer expresses disappointment and seems to expect the learners to talk about the pain, which, as she had said previously, she struggled to express herself.

Throughout the three observed tours, Eileen Meyer constantly compared past and present, and constructed an idealised, mythical past: there existed no gangs like they do today – gangsters were 'gentlemen' – and there were no internal tensions within the community. This construction seems to confirm the uniting characteristic Seixas allocates to a factual approach to history. There are, however, many 'others' in her constructed past and present. 'Others' situated in the past were the rats in the run-down houses and the drunkards on the street, but also the government who took the people away. Present 'others' were the researcher, 'black' learners and the 'stupid' learners who rang bells and looked into people's houses. Eileen Meyer apologised to the researcher when she talked negatively about 'the whites' in the area and while the 'black' learners were mostly 'invisible' in the interaction, she implicitly apologised to them when she talked about 'kaffir keppies'. She used this term to refer to headwear of a church in the area that mostly 'blacks' attended. She might have directed this careful positioning of her use of this derogatory, racist term not only towards the 'black' learners, but also towards the 'coloured' learners and the 'white', 'foreign' researcher – a 'present' generation that knows this discourse is not 'politically correct' in post-apartheid South Africa. The different assumptions and expectations of primary witness Eileen Meyer and the secondary witness learners, teacher and researcher come across clearly in the interaction below.

... She tells the learners that at that time there were no burglar bars, etc.; you would sleep with everything open. There were no gangs (as they know gangs today). A learner asks if there were 'white' people living there. EM says all people lived there, 'black', 'coloured', 'white', Christian, Muslim, Jew ... She tells them when people came from work, and were drunk, and would lie in the street, nobody would rob their wages. People would help them get home. 'There wasn't crime, man. ... the gangs would fight amongst each other, not with people.' She says there is hurt inside, because they were uprooted, 'you know, an uprooted tree'. If they would be given back the houses and area, it wouldn't be the same, she says. A male learner comments: 'so you're saying they took a big part of your life away?' EM confirms this. (Moving from metaphor to metonym!) She lists the names of her neighbours. She says people would have 13 children in a two-bedroom

house. The learners seem to be shocked (though two 'black' girls just stare. I find it difficult to read their facial expressions. They're far more shy and reserved than the other learners. They didn't ask a question.) A (male, 'coloured') learner asks, 'What race had most children?' A (male, 'black') learner reformulates: 'Which race dominated?' The teacher and EM almost simultaneously comment, 'You're not listening'. (Is there a conflation of past-present going on here? Learners bringing in THEIR everyday life concepts!). The answer EM gives seems unclear (to me): she seems to want to say 'all of them', but then comments – with a softer voice – that in this street it was all Christians. She also tells them they didn't have a bathroom. (again, I see the two 'black' girls just stare. Do they have a bathroom?). A boy in front asks further and EM tells it was two bedrooms, one small kitchen and a dining room. Toilet outside. EM asks a girl to stand close to her, 'I don't want funny things to happen'. She continues: when they wanted to bath, they had to fill the enamel bath, with cold water. The children were bathed in front of the stove. ... (Researcher's observation notes on first group).

Interestingly, she did not address the many 'white' and 'black' people we met on the street, but to the group she often commented that the 'white' people did not pay good prices for the houses in the past and that now the houses are businesses and are worth much more. In contrast, she said, when she wants to come to church, she cannot, because she does not have transport, she does not have a car. When 'white' people living in the area addressed her, Eileen Meyer did not, could not, express this injustice. Instead, she positioned the learners as unknowing secondary witnesses.

At the corner of a road, an old 'white' woman entering her house asks, 'What's going on?' EM explains to her that she tells the children there used to be a shop on the site of her house. [...] EM also says (as if to downplay the 'political' character of the walk), 'Learners don't know [this area].' [Researcher's observation notes on first group]

Eileen Meyer's regulative discourse was closely linked with her positioning of self and others in history in a space that, for her, is filled with painful memories. This is especially clear in the interaction that took place when the groups arrived back at the school. Her regulative discourse was so dominant at this point of the interaction that, to the researcher, it sounded like giving a sermon.

EM addresses the whole class, saying she is disappointed in them. She says she hoped this talk (walk) would have drawn them together. (Community/identity building!)

She refers to me again, saying, 'A visitor from varsity'.

(This is the first time she explains to the learners who I am. Early on during the walk I heard a boy asking the teacher what my name was, but he didn't get a response).

EM: [...] 'Grow up!' 'Stop acting like little babies!'

(She is starting a sermon here!)

'Don't say things to hurt the next person'. 'Don't hurt the person's feelings! We're all human beings!' 'I hope you're gonna pull yourselves together ... don't be hard on teachers ... it's plain rudeness ... stand up to those who're rude ... Stand up to them! ... Why? Why? I want to know why? Do you come from homes where things like this are tolerated? ... you come to school to LEARN ... why to suffer because of a few? ...'

She refers to the other groups who still have to do the walk: 'Do you think I want to do it?' She says she doesn't do this as part of her job, it's not part of her job description, she doesn't get money for this. She does it because of her love for children. 'You have to pull yourselves together ...' She refers to township schools (she refers to 'coloured' areas only)

'Maybe there they allow [you to do this]'

'Here we want doctors, lawyers from you guys!' 'I wanna be proud of you people!' She says what she says goes one ear in and one ear out.

(The learners look blank).

'Let your teacher also be proud of you.' (so they don't talk about 'Grade 9X' this and that).  
'She's not your mother, she's here to teach you.' [Researcher's observation notes on first group]

She addresses the whole group, saying she's disappointed, she thought they were better than [name of another Grade 9 class].

'You didn't even bother [your teacher]', 'Why not appreciate what we adults do for you?'

The teacher comments it was not all of them, only a few.

EM says she thinks they have to go to [name 'coloured' township] high school.

'They corner you in the toilets and slit your throat!'

She asks them what they have learnt.

A girl thanks her in name of the class, saying, 'even though some of us didn't behave'. She says they learnt about the area.

EM echoes: 'of the area, the area.' [Researcher's observation notes on third group]

In these 'sermons', Eileen Meyer's positioning of self and others in history seemed to run strongly along generational lines. At the end of the first observed tour, she insulted and shamed the learners by positioning them as 'little babies' (see Antaki and Widdicombe 1998) and by referring derogatively to the areas a majority of the learners came from as well as to 'coloured' township schools. She repeated the latter insult at the end of the third tour. This positioning is complex. On the surface, it seems she was talking only about the present generation's 'discipline'. She positions the 'ill discipline' (or chaos?) within the learners, but, more importantly, in 'their' areas. Eileen Meyer distances herself from the Cape Flats where she lives, and constructs it as solely 'theirs'. Instead of allocating responsibility or agency within the apartheid government who had created these areas – and had dumped 'non-white' people in them – she talks in a demeaning way about the learners, 'their' townships and township schools.

Because of this shift in agency, the researcher had the impression that Eileen Meyer had displaced her anger and the hurt caused by the apartheid forced removals. In other words, she seemed to split off her own, intolerable feelings of anger and bitterness onto the 'misbehaving' children. It is easier, and possibly more acceptable, to be angry with the children than to show anger and hurt towards for example the old 'white' woman we met on our way, or the even more distant apartheid government. This interpretation, however, might be the researcher's *expectation* of what 'a primary witness would or should feel'. In spite of the fact that one can interpret it as an empowerment, the act of going through the area, and re-inscribing it with history and with people who lived there in the past, seemed to be painful and possibly disempowering for Meyer.

Miemie Taljaard, an Afrikaans-speaking English teacher and one of the proofreaders of this study, said the following about Eileen Meyer's 'sermons': 'I would consider [it] normal [for] a certain generation and group. I have always associated it with the extended family and it might be a way of including the learners, a way of showing concern. The learners from another social standing and generation would not understand or accept it as such, but it could have been meant to be an 'inclusive' sermon' (Taljaard 2007).

### Primary narratives and working towards democratic change

The analysis above might come across as 'bleak': what does it tell us about the potential of primary narratives in democratic change? Eileen Meyer's reflections during the interview seem to suggest that she perceives herself as powerless in past and present relationships alike:

'... the hurt that we have inside [...] is like a sore that will never heal. It gets the [scab]. [The scab] falls off, but you still have that oozing of that sore [...] It's still sore. But um, what can we do? That was the government; we couldn't fight against them. Who were we? We were nothing! And we're still nothing! People, uh, uh, think that we have a say in the country, but we don't. (long pause.) They think that we have a say but we don't have a say! You can't just say what you want to! They said freedom of speech but I can't just tell my boss 'I don't like the way you treat me' because he, he's gonna tell me, 'Who the heck do you think you are?' Am I right so? Where's this freedom of speech coming? So we also gotta be careful what we say. You must be very careful what we (sic) say, it's not easy ...'

Her interaction with the learners, similarly, seemed to suggest there is no Possible, in the sense that she did not seem to be hopeful that the country and its people can *change*. Instead, she idealised and stereotyped *the* past with the underlying assumption that there is only *one* past and that Past and thus the Present and the Possible are *closed*. Her underlying feelings of anger, resentment and bitterness, however, fragment this constructed closure. These underlying, often unnamed, feelings might potentially impede empathic understanding on the side of the learners if they are not assisted in analysing the complexities within these interactions, enveloping both pedagogical subject-positions and positions of self and others in history.

The relevant literature indicates that the above typified pedagogical practice and approach to history do not contribute to changing teachers' and learners' perceptions, and, in a wider context, the democratisation of society. The 'ideal' dialogue would be 'analytic' and 'constructive': inviting the participants to *analyse* and consciously reflect on the interrelatedness of self and the world, and our desire for *both* closure – historical certainty, emblemisation and identification – and openness – fragmentation, otherness. (Simon 2005: 33, 77; LaCapra 2001: 218-219). In this kind of dialogue, 'the Other' is acknowledged as being located on several different levels: as much as 'the Other' is part of the world outside the self, the self, within its own being, also has unknowable or unconscious characteristics, which one does not always want to, or

is able to, address (see Bar-On 1999: 256, 265; LaCapra 2001: 168-169, 218-219; Wertsch 1998: 116-117). At the same time, this kind of dialogue is *constructive* in its recognition of and commitment to ‘the ethical relationship between self and others in the narratives we tell [and listen to]’ (Simon 2005: 23).

One cannot, however, be conclusive with regard to the potential of Eileen Meyer’s involvement in the observed pedagogical interaction. The potential of the primary witness’s involvement in a pedagogical interaction depends on the other interactions the learners are involved in. Learners did interact with each other during the tour. One interaction overheard by the researcher indicated that some learners did temporarily identify with Meyer’s plight and the plight of their ancestors; they showed empathy, an appreciation for the specific position, the personal experiences of the speaker (on defining empathy see LaCapra 2001: 27, 211-213 and Field 2006: 37-39):

A male learner to another boy: ‘I wanna come back’ (to this area?).

The other boy says, ‘You can’t.’

When EM tells about her husband being buried at the church, these boys say, ‘Oh shame.’ (They seem to be genuine). [Researcher’s observation notes on third group]

The researcher did not observe a reaction from Eileen Meyer on these learners’ positioning. When one learner, in the first group, asked a rather critical question, ‘Did you fight?’, she did not respond either. During the tour, learners themselves often remarked on the fact that they do not know the area or when they knew people who did live there, they could not give details. One boy said the grandfather of a girl in Grade 11 used to live in the area (see first extract above). However, Eileen Meyer told the researcher some days later that some learners walked up to her, often after the actual tour or a day later at school and told her that their parents and/or grandparents had experienced the forced removals from the same area.

These ‘other’ interactions, both during the tour and afterwards, seem to ‘ripple’ from Meyer’s testimony. This is a hopeful sign but also needs to be subjected to research in the future. A key question is how do learners take this kind of testimony home? How do they reformulate it, as secondary witnesses, and how do their parents, and/or other family members and acquaintances respond as primary and/or secondary witnesses? Is the testimony taken further in the history classroom? If so, how?

Gaining access to these other spaces is a challenge, however. During the time of the research, two history teachers at the school were also interviewed, one of them being the Lesley Adonis quoted above. Despite an initial agreement with Lesley Adonis to observe her Grade 9 history classes and notwithstanding several attempts, the researcher had no contact with her after the tours. It is possible, however, that her pedagogical practice and approach to history were similar to the majority of the teachers interviewed and observed in the doctoral research, namely speaking and routinely acting from within a factual approach to history with its particular underlying epistemological roles: there is one, best, story about the past that teachers must tell and the learners must accept and reproduce. This contrasts with what the

Department of Education envisions as a pedagogy that focuses on not only disciplined historical skills but also learning outcomes around historical consciousness, citizenship and democracy (DOE 2002: 4-6, 92-3; 2003: 29, 36).

The challenge, however, might lie deeper, or elsewhere, because teachers who spoke and acted within pedagogical practices and approaches to history that theoretically were more conducive to an analytic and constructive dialogue invested in similarly deep yet differing ways in relation to not only the ideal of nation-building (which Seixas (2000) alone typifies as being characteristic of a factual approach to history) but also the epistemological roles mentioned above.

In the case of Eileen Meyer, moreover, we learn that not only is the interaction with the learners accompanied by unspoken assumptions and expectations, but so is the interaction with the people that were met on the street. These passers-by were in age either contemporaries of Eileen Meyer or of the generation of her children, the learners' parents. They were from all kinds of life, representing the full spectrum of the agents of the apartheid drama. Only the present 'white' people were included in her exposé but, as mentioned above, in a seemingly contradictory way: While she portrayed the 'white' people as the ones benefiting from the forced removals in her interaction with the learners, teacher and researcher, she could not directly address or confront them with this injustice.

The complexity and pain that come with these kinds of interactions, and non-existent interactions, might be one of the reasons a majority of teachers do not engage with primary narratives in the first place, whether these are their own or those of others. However, the emotional, personal experiences of teachers and, in this case, the primary witness 'spill over', beg to be witnessed. Similarly, the observations discussed in the doctoral study seem to suggest that teachers' primary experiences are 'an excess' that nonetheless seeps through, even when teachers try to avoid them, for example by *not* sharing their own primary narratives. This seeping through happens in uncanny ways in forms of regulative comments, or when learners specifically *ask* the teachers about their own experiences. We cannot avoid this or act as if it is not there. Not only teachers but also society at large, including researchers and teacher trainers working at universities, do not fully realise that they teach through who they *are*, that they are implicated not merely in their role as teachers, but as historical agents in forming, conserving and changing values in education and the wider community (see also Modiba 1996).

### **Conclusion: Providing a safe space**

Faced with this complexity and the imperatives of the curriculum, what is possible in such pedagogical contexts? Researchers and teacher trainers are often cast in the role of 'the one to fix it', 'the one who knows'. Two teachers involved in the research asked to be 'workshopped'. Teachers and facilitators such as Eileen Meyer need support. But

what kind of support? Perhaps not, or not only, in the form of ‘theory’ and ‘the best practice’ because that kind of ‘workshop’ similarly adheres to the underlying assumed epistemological roles mentioned above, where one party ‘knows’, the other party ‘accepts’ and ‘reproduces’. Moreover, as suggested above, the theoretical ideals do not automatically seem to guarantee the desired outcome of democratic change. In the doctoral research on which this article is based, the creation of a ‘safe’ space was suggested where teachers, and other educators, including primary witnesses, can engage with the primary narratives of self and others and other ‘forgotten’ aspects within the teaching and learning process discussed above. This kind of ‘safe’ space could be conducive to a growing understanding and an ability for educators in turn to create a ‘safe’ space for the current South African youth to engage with, listen to and witness a primary narrative.

As Simon and Eppert (1997: 178-182) explain, this space might enable a learning that entails two forms of attentiveness: not only a ‘learning about’ but also a ‘learning from’, not only discipline-specific *judgement* but also *apprenticeship* in witnessing the performance of another person’s experience. The listener/learner, in other words, learns to approach the primary narrative not only as historical knowledge, but also as a summoning. The words ‘safe’ and ‘safe place’ are important; this is what the clinical child psychologist Winnicott calls ‘a good-enough holding environment’. While Winnicott developed the latter notion in the context of parenting, Ellsworth, amongst others, has applied it to pedagogy. ‘A good-enough holding environment’, she explains, provides ‘some measure’ of continuity, reliability and hospitality so that we dare to take risks to ‘break continuity’, question and move beyond the known, beyond tradition (Ellsworth 2005: 70). This kind of space might be crucial in that the ‘absence’ of free speech and of a belief in an ever-other future, and, as some would put it, a ‘lack’ of educational quality, involves not merely a material concern, in the form of material resources and one’s professional training, but also, and maybe more importantly (Taylor et al. 2003), the teachers’/facilitators’/witnesses’ self-image and their moral status in society.

### Interviews

Lesley Adonis, Interview on 14 April 2005 at a former HOR school, Cape Town.

Eileen Meyer, Interview on 18 April 2005 at a former HOR school, Cape Town.

### Observations

Eileen Meyer, Observations April 2005 at a former HOR school, Cape Town.

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**Notes on the author**

Sofie Geschier came to South Africa from Belgium in 2001 to research ways in which teachers and museum facilitators construct and use primary narratives in history education. Over the last six years she has been teaching and lecturing in the Department of Historical Studies and the School of Education at the University of Cape Town, from which she recently graduated with a doctoral degree. She now lectures in the School of Education.

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# Curriculum as a product of an activity system: Translating policy in the teaching of History

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## Abstract

The paper draws on the Activity Theory (AT) to investigate pedagogical practices in a junior certificate history classroom by selecting an aim-focused lesson as the unit of analysis. Using the theory to mark how a teacher performed in the specific lesson, an effort is made to clarify an understanding of the aim by looking at it as constituting what Engeström (2001, 2003) calls ‘the structure of objects’ in the lesson. To this end, the article tries to understand the teacher’s pedagogical activity as shaped by the artefacts (strategies) and tools (teaching aids) that she chose on the basis of an understanding of this structure and rules that governed acceptable acts in her context. Drawing on a detailed study of this lesson, the question of whether or not it is possible to facilitate teaching that promotes critical thinking in a Swazi context is addressed. This is done by elaborating on Enslin’s views on teaching that is aimed at promoting critical inquiry before discussing AT as a framework for analysing the activities that occurred in the lesson. Focusing on the aim of the syllabus as a symbolic policy tool, the study reveals how the contradiction between this aim and the teacher’s activity reflected the influence of internalised rules of behaviour. The contradictions are also viewed as a resource to clarify the nature of the constraints that prevented the effective translation of the aims of the syllabus into activities that could have contributed to the successful implementation of the syllabus.

**Key words:** Swaziland, activity system, consciousness, policy, History

## Introduction: Teaching History in junior secondary school in Swaziland – post-independence

Since Swaziland gained independence in 1968, a major aim of the government has been to create access to primary school education for every child. In the early years of the new kingdom, access generally meant adequate provision of classrooms and resources, with the result that there was a great increase in the building of schools, the provision of textbooks to learners and the number of trained teachers. Relatively little

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attention was paid to the quality of teaching and learning that occurred in these schools and a considerable number of children of school-going age were not in school, largely as a result of dropping-out owing to persistent poor performance during the course of the year and repeated failure of grades. According to NERCOM (1985: 31-32) 'the number of school leavers (taken as those who fail the junior level) increased by 30 per cent between 1975 and 1983 ... There is reason, therefore, for the government to consider more seriously re-organising the curriculum or diversify it in order to provide quality education'.

When in 1985 government paid attention to improving the quality of school education to help reduce the number of children who were repeating classes, a number of standard beliefs and practices were criticised. These included the separation of theoretical from practical knowledge, the work of the mind from that of the hand, practical from academic learning and inductive from deductive epistemologies.

The National Education Review Commission (NERCOM) was set up to examine the 'quality, efficiency and effectiveness of the formal school education system' (Magagula 1995: 5-6). It held meetings with the public, in both urban and rural areas, to find out and document views on how to improve the quality and efficiency of the education system. Plenary sessions were also organised for people who showed an interest in education, e.g. parents, teachers and college and university lecturers.

From this consultation process, amongst other factors, calls emerged to develop more coherent theories of educational development. Concepts such as 'practice-theory', 'tacit knowledge', 'the reflective practitioner' and 'knowledge in activity' and strategies aimed at breaking away from instrumental ways of teaching and learning were increasingly emphasised.

As far as the teaching of History was concerned, it was felt that teachers depended mainly on the detailed textbooks that the government provided as curriculum guidance documents. There was no policy that spelt out the aims for teaching the subject. Textbooks were used together with past examination papers to direct curriculum work. As a result, teaching and learning History involved primarily familiarising students with the content as preparation for the examination. The lecture method was commonly used for content drilling. This rote learning caused students to lose any interest they may have had in the subject (Mazibuko 1989).

To regenerate interest and improve the status of History as a school subject, the Ministry of Education had to spell out for teachers the expected curriculum outcomes. Teachers were expected to develop skills relevant to History as a field of study at school by using appropriate methods of teaching. The history classroom had to provide opportunities for learners to develop competences that promoted both their intellectual and their personal development. A new junior certificate syllabus expressed these competences as follows:

... to develop

- a critical ability to analyse and synthesise historical material
- an awareness of the people, forces and events which have led to the social, economic and political situation in Southern Africa and the world. This awareness should begin with the students' environment and expand to nation, Africa and the world
- an interest in and enjoyment of History (Ministry of Education, Swaziland 1997)

The new curriculum expected Swazi teachers to understand that the aims of the syllabus emphasised the need to shift students from narrowly defined conceptions of a nation, Africa and the world and help them understand that such conceptions were constituted on the basis of mutual belief and history and connected to a particular territory thought to be marked off from other communities by distinct traits (Miller 2000). It was not only important to clarify the significance of the past reality and historical statements to how these concepts were understood, but also to encourage students to ask new questions about what was taught in relation to these concepts. In short, history teaching had to develop what Lee (2002) calls meta-historical understanding. It had to be concerned primarily with the intellectual and personal development of the learners rather than interpretative activities relating the current state of the discipline to new research findings (see also Husbands 1996).

Enslin (1999) too emphasises the importance of helping students learn the skills of rational inquiry and encouraging them to practise those skills. As she explains:

The crucial features of education ... would be in the first place, that authority would not be accepted unquestioningly. In the second place, to be able to participate rationally and with independence, individuals would need to acquire skills of critical thinking (p. 25).

The view implied that in the case of this syllabus, learners had to be helped to understand how national myths and histories have come about and how they and others were affected by them (see also Anderson 1991).

Appiah (1992) has argued that African identities must be viewed in terms of the external determinants of their history, which include European, Afro-New World conceptions of Africa and their own endogenous cultural tradition. The view allows for an interruptive, interrogative and enunciatory space of new forms of meanings and production, blurring the limitations of existing boundaries and calling into question established categorisations of nationhood and identity. This hybridity creates a space that must be considered as an ambivalent site where cultural meaning and representations cannot have fixed beginnings (see also Gilroy 1993; Bhabha 1994). In practice this implies that it is important to work with concepts related to identity in a manner that highlights that national and personal identities are formed over time from contact with others.

In Swaziland there is, in general, limited research into the teaching of critical thinking as a curriculum issue. The research that has been carried out is concerned mainly with how teachers use objectives in planning their lessons (Magagula 1995), how a specific programme has increased the workload for the teachers (Zungu 1993; Hlophe 1996, 1997; Tungesvik 1998) and the general difficulties that teachers experience when

working with the continuous assessment programme, such as being unable to work effectively with the huge teacher-pupil ratios, jargon of the programme and a lack of adequate resources to facilitate its implementation (Gule 1999; Ndzabukelwako 1999, Vilakati 2003).

The study to which this article relates considered how teachers were translating the syllabus' aims into practice at classroom level. Specifically, it wished to find out how they mediated realities in their context to nurture the intellectual and personal development of learners as prescribed by the syllabus. Of particular interest was how they engaged consciously or otherwise with the complex factors that influenced behaviour in this context. The way they taught had to be understood against the background of the entire activity system within which they worked. To understand the influence of this system, it was thus necessary to establish how teachers were translating the concepts and principles associated with what Harley and Wedekind (2003) describe as the implicit pedagogical models of policy that need to be studied whenever any form of policy studies are conducted. In their view, education policy analysis will not result in insights that can be drawn on to improve teaching and learning if conducted without a disciplinary base as a lens. It was therefore acknowledged that the aims of the syllabus pointed to the disciplinary knowledge and skills that were to focus teachers' activities during lessons. This knowledge and these skills had to be taught in ways that fulfilled what is understood as the purpose of teaching 'History' as a school subject.

It would, however, have been difficult to understand what made teachers select the activities and teaching aids they used in lessons in isolation from what would be acceptable in their context. The researchers accepted that the implementation of the syllabus would not be free from geopolitical concepts organised around the ideas of nation, Africa and the world that were promoted within Swaziland. Their actions could not be viewed as having no location.

Ball (1993) too emphasises that any form of policy has to be seen as a representation that will be decoded through actors' interpretations and meanings in relation to their history, experiences, skills, resources and context. The value systems underpinning policies cannot be decoded in isolation of the social context for which they are meant. Trying to understand their decoding in context therefore requires efforts to identify what is conceived as ideal in a society as a reflection of interests, conflicts, forms of domination and notions of justice. These factors manifest themselves structurally, interactively and discursively. In education they are reflected by, amongst others, ways of conceiving and implementing policy at a micro-level. As a result, in the study reported on here, it was assumed that, contrary to what was expected by education authorities in Swaziland, teachers could not understand and translate into practice the aims of the syllabus without drawing on their common-sense as a basis for considering norms of conduct in a context. As Taylor (1989) would argue, the norms of conduct in their context would have generated this common-sense. As a source for making meaning, it shaped the teachers' behaviour.

The researchers viewed the syllabus as a policy symbolic tool (Schneider and Ingram 1990) that pointed to what was supposed to be reflected by the teaching of History. However, as a tool that was advocating 'revolutionising praxis' (Gramsci 1971: 322), its adoption had to challenge the common-sensical or familiar ways of teaching. Teachers' activities had to be understood within the context in which the social norms, school structures and curricula of times past needed to be re-formed.

According to Giddens (1990: 79), such 'disembedding of social relations' happens when '... larger and larger numbers of people live in circumstances in which disembedded institutions, linking local practices with globalised social relations, organise major aspects of day-to-day life'. However, he also points out that such institutional transformations may be dangerous to social actors; '... moral commitments and "good faith" can themselves be potentially dangerous ...' (Giddens 1990: 156). Therefore, the syllabus as what Schneider and Ingram (1990) would view as a symbolic and hortatory tool was meant to motivate teachers to promote the transformations by convincing them that what was expected of them was in line with the values and beliefs to be promoted in their context. As they explain, 'symbolic pronouncements seek to convince people of the importance and priority government is associating with certain activities or goals, even though actual commitment of resources or development of programs may not be underway' (Schneider and Ingram 1990: 520).

Drawing on Engestrom's views (Engestrom 2001; Engestrom, Miettinen and Pumamaki 2003) that human acts are informed partly by an understanding of the rules that govern acceptable acts in a context, the researchers assumed that the introduction of the syllabus was an attempt to rationalise policy expectations by associating them with preferred symbols or people's values and beliefs. Even though the information and resources needed to realise its expectations were not available, the syllabus afforded teachers the opportunity to change their perceptions of appropriate teaching for History. Informed by the assumption, the syllabus served as a symbolic tool aimed at convincing the teachers that the prescribed content could be drawn upon to serve students' personal, national and intellectual needs for development.

### **Engestrom on the relationship between human acts and social structure as context**

According to Engestrom (2001 and Engestrom, Miettinen and Pumamaki 2003), there are three mutual relationships in every activity, namely between the subject and object, between the subject and community and between the community and object. Human practice/activities are oriented to the achievement of particular goals, having a purpose and a structure of objects. This structure influences the nature of both an individual's external behaviour and mental functioning or consciousness. Activities are mediated not only by these input processes but also their environment, which consists of entities that combine all kinds of objective features, including culturally determined ones.

An activity can also be mediated by artefacts and tools that people use to act on the object space. These are tools that mediate thought during interaction between subjects and the context within an activity. There may also be rules on what is seen and defined as acceptable in terms of knowledge and experiences for the subjects. Crucially, this does not make activities neutral. They have an established history of use and carry within them cultural meanings.

Activities have objects as representations of the space in which subjects act. As what Engestrom calls the 'raw material', objects not only provide an orientation to activities but help us to understand the system within which they occur. They (activities) are mediated by artefacts and tools. At the level of understanding/internalisation of the objects of activities, the artefacts and tools used can be looked at critically to develop a picture of what people are working on and motivation for doing so. Consequently, the identification of the artefacts and tools used can enable us to identify the object of the system. As externalisation, procedural operations will indicate the norms, conventions and social interactions that drive actions. It is in this sense that activities possess elements or properties of the object that shape and direct the way individuals work or act.

To understand the teachers' strategies one thus had to look at how they had been constructed by a combination of features in their physical context, i.e. what Engestrom calls 'the structure of objects'. They had to be looked at against the background of the entire activity system within which they worked, through mapping what was essential to them. Whilst it was acknowledged that the aims of the syllabus provided partly this 'structure of objects' as a framework they drew on to shape what they did during lessons, the researchers believed that their actions were also informed by their understanding of the rules that governed acceptable acts in their context. According to Engestrom, the 'structure of objects' has to be considered as influencing the nature of both external behaviour and mental functioning. Therefore, on the one hand, teachers' activities were seen as reflecting elements or properties of the aims of the syllabus that they mediated by means of the strategies (artefacts) and teaching aids (tools) that shaped and directed the way they taught. On the other hand, these artefacts and tools reflected or did not what they had internalised as rules of behaviour. The latter was about their motivation for working as they did – a product of how the syllabus aims and their conceptual and practical implications were understood and this understanding externalised through a choice of particular strategies and aids that, in turn, reflected a taken-for-granted stance towards norms, conventions and social interactions that had to drive actions as procedural operations.

However, as Engestrom pointed out, these procedural operations were seen as informed not only by the aims of the syllabus but also by the context in which they functioned and defined by what different participants are allocated as responsibilities, tasks and influence/power within a community. In the case of the particular lesson reported on by this paper, the community comprised not only the teacher and students

who worked together on the aims of the syllabus in a History lesson, but also the school, and it even extended to what was understood as constituting the people of Swaziland. This wider community oriented teachers to certain ways of acting, as it defined norms and standards of behaviour.

Fulfilment of the aims of the syllabus was a collective activity to be carried out by dividing the labour among the members of the community, i.e. by assigning different actions to different participants. In the study, the rules that regulated and sanctioned the exchange and interaction among the participants went beyond the usual roles between teacher and students and had to be understood in terms of the teachers' role within a context in which critical analysis and synthesis of historical content had to be taught and learned.

The model of activity looked at here was thus that of a monarchical mediational system that was characteristic of Swaziland. Even though it was suspected that there might be times when, in Engestrom's (2001: 134) words, 'what the processes of [an] activity were directed to did not, consequently, coincide with what stimulated them' policy could not readily be dismissed as window-dressing. The researchers thought that for education authorities to provide the syllabus, there must have been hope that teachers had the capacity to avoid contradictions between the different relationships in the activity system by ensuring that they devised strategies and chose tools (aids) that would promote the spirit of the syllabus without threatening the power structures within their wider community. They hoped for the possibility of the teachers' strategies and chosen aids being used to achieve this without appearing to be in disagreement with the standards and norms generally promoted within society. Alternative ways of teaching to nurture critical thinking were not to be threatening to the status quo. The researchers expected them to be able to reconcile the essence of the syllabus' aims on the basis of what is crucial to Critical History and the norms of conduct within the country. In the event that contradictions were manifested (cf. Engestrom 2001), they had to be viewed positively as providing cues to adaptations that could help teachers to fulfil syllabus requirements by refining their strategies in ways that promoted the intellectual growth of the students without alienating them from their context. Making them critically aware of the social, economic and political situation in their country, region, continent and world was not supposed, in the researchers' view, to position them negatively towards their own context.

The study answered the following questions:

1. *What was the content of a specific History lesson?*

The teachers' actions and aids were to reveal how they understood the aims of the syllabus. The teaching materials and strategies they chose to use were of special interest. They reflected what they considered to be the best tools to help them clarify the principles that were implied by the aims of the syllabus.

2. *What reflected the teachers' understanding of what to consider in devising strategies*

*for teaching and choosing tools and aids?*

Observing teachers' lessons and conducting simulated informal interviews based on the observation data was aimed at obtaining explanations that would clarify their understanding of the broad systemic requirements within which they were working. The researchers considered their actions and how they accounted for these actions as reflecting what they considered important in reconciling the aims of the syllabus and what they considered to be their responsibilities and tasks they had the authority to perform in the system in which they worked.

The design that was adopted is described below.

### **Sampling**

The sample for this study was not meant to be representative, as the aim was not to make generalisations but to establish how a group of teachers understood and translated curriculum aims and responded to a variety of other features in their context. The study targeted History teachers who taught the junior certificate classes (Form 1, 2 or 3). In Swaziland, these are secondary school grades for students whose ages range from 13 years in Form 1 to 15 in Form 3.

Teachers had to possess at least a four-year post-'O' Level professional qualification and to have studied History as a major in their tertiary education. It was also a requirement that they had taught for at least two years. With these qualifications and this work experience they were likely to have been exposed to the latest research and debates on the teaching of History in their teacher training and in-service professional development programmes. The study aimed to examine whether the exposure would have had an impact on their curriculum literacy.

Permission to work with the schools was sought through the regional office of the city of Manzini, which asked schools to volunteer to participate in the study. The staff of one school volunteered within a few days of receiving the invitation. Moser and Kalton's (1979) view that the motivation of a research population is affected by their initial decision to cooperate was taken advantage of in this regard.

Arrangements were made to visit the school to explain in greater detail the purpose of the study and how data was going to be collected and used. The potential participants were assured that information collected would be treated as confidential but published academically to promote debate and the further improvement of History teaching. They consented to this.

### **Profile of the school**

The school that participated in this study is in an urban area. It is a co-educational high school of 650 students and 24 teachers, 15 of whom were female and nine male. Even though it is a church school, its admission policy is non-selective and students

from different denominations are enrolled. The school accommodates both boarders and day students. The school has a well-stocked library and a variety of History textbooks that students could refer to when working on their research projects. It also receives a daily supply of newspapers.

## Sample

Not all five of the History teachers in the school participated in the study. It proved difficult to persuade a senior male member of the management team staff who also taught History to participate, as he complained of having no time as he was busy with other tasks as deputy head. Following Moser and Kalton's (1979) advice, the researchers responded to the situation by changing their focus from covering the whole target population in the school to dealing with a population that comprised the elements they had isolated as important to the study. In the end, four teachers – three female and one male – participated in the study.

Even though there was an element missing from the sample frame, it was believed that non-participation by one member of the target population, significant though it was, would not harm the data collected. Recognising that relying on data from the four teachers only might be questioned on the basis of the study – as interpretive work, held up to critical scrutiny – not providing adequate evidence for the conclusions, it is important to emphasise that this study did not use data as research data *per se* unless it could be corroborated by what was revealed or obtained through other sources (Phillips 2000). Therefore, without data that could be weighed against data obtained through observation of a lesson presented by the deputy head-teacher, and thus strengthen the research process or expose weaknesses in the findings, there was no choice but to allow him to drop out of the study. What was crucial for Engestrom's principle of change – in this study, problems related to the appropriate translation of the aims of the syllabus – could not be identified through the research process for this teacher. In short, the research process had to ensure data-integrity and contribute to the credibility and usefulness of the study (Phillips 2000).

**Table 1: Profile of the participants**

	Qualification	Teaching experience	Level taught
Teacher 1 – Female	BA Humanities + teaching cert.	More than 11 years	Forms 1 and 3
Teacher 2 – Male	BA Humanities + teaching cert.	2 years	Forms 1 and 2
Teacher 3 – Female	BA Humanities + teaching cert.	3 years and 4 months	Form 3
Teacher 4 – Female	BA Humanities + teaching cert.	More than 11 years	Form 2

For this paper, a lesson with the aim of 'nurturing of a national identity through History' was chosen, based on the following criteria:

1. It provided a good example from which a deeply nuanced understanding of the influence of context could be developed. In this lesson, cultural rituals generally taken for granted as worthwhile within the context had to be subjected to critical scrutiny through teaching for the aims of the syllabus to be fulfilled.
2. It serves as a good example to highlight the kind of disposition required of a teacher if History is to contribute to learners' intellectual and personal development.

### **Methodological framework**

The classroom activities of the teachers and their pupils were considered to be situated, mindful performances, both socio-culturally and historically (Phillips 2000).

The design type used in this study was that of an exploratory case study (Yin 2009). Dual methods were also employed. Firstly, classroom observations to obtain thick descriptions of teachers' activities as a way life were used and video-recorded at the end. In addition to this, all other available artefacts and aids used during lessons and other forms of interaction were noted. This includes teaching aids, work-plans, teachers' lesson preparation and students' homework. The study looked at what the teachers were doing in relation to the syllabus goals – the absence being accounted for by the teachers' mindful avoidance of actions considered to be reflective of contextual norms of conduct that it was important not to contradict.

Thus, an account first had to be given of how teachers translated the aims of the syllabus into teaching activities. Four classroom observations had to be conducted in four different classrooms, and one History lesson delivered by each of the four teachers had to be video-recorded.

Secondly, on the basis of the accounts obtained from the observations, a method that would be a useful communication strategy had to be identified to obtain greater clarity on the rules that influenced their teaching. Being familiar with how far they could or not push the edges of the constraints in this situation and exploit the possibilities their classrooms afforded them for engaging with the aims of the syllabus unimpeded (Lortie 1975) was crucial. How possible was this in the context of their country?

To answer the question, informal discussion-type interviews were initiated by encouraging teachers to view these lessons and account for their teaching. Each was shown the video recording of their teaching and then asked questions about significant instances in the lesson. The process seemed appropriate because it was hoped it would make the teachers (in the words of Van Dalen 1979: 158) '... more willing to communicate orally than in writing, and, therefore, will provide data more readily in an interview ... advantages accrue from friendly interaction in an interview that cannot be obtained in limited, impersonal questionnaire contacts'.

Stimulated recall discussions were used to enable the researchers the possibility of seeing the classroom practices through the teachers' eyes. These discussions involved the researchers showing them extracts from their classroom practice video and then

asking them to explain what was happening without interrupting them with questions. This helped the researchers to deal with the relationship the teachers considered to have existed between their actual practice and their intentions for the choice of strategies and aids they used for this practice, i.e. the motivation for doing what was observed. Conscious and critical consideration of the teachers' explanations, as well as scrutiny of practice through these discussions, facilitated an understanding of what drove their actions. It also facilitated an understanding of the critical relationship between their practice and context (Engestrom 2001). Where this relationship was not clarified for us in their accounts, questions were asked about what we considered to be pertinent instances of their practices identified from the video-recordings. Notes made during the observations, teacher work-plans and lesson preparations and the homework they gave also formed useful sources of data. Teachers were asked to provide copies of the latter.

Activities and aids used for organising interaction with learners were considered, respectively, as reflecting the artefacts (strategies) and tools (teaching aids) the teachers employed as resources for the teaching and learning they had to promote in a way that would not contradict the meanings of what was accepted as the other important 'objective features' within their environment (cf. Engestrom).

### **Collection of data**

The researchers started by observing three 40-minute lessons presented by each teacher to accustom them to their presence in the classroom. One lesson per week was observed and detailed notes were made after each. The observation of the fourth lesson was recorded on video-tape and used for the study. This required the researchers spending a month with the teachers. One teacher allowed them to observe the three lessons, but when they were ready to record the fourth lesson she (teacher 1) decided to revise her previous lessons and indicated that she preferred the lesson not to be recorded. The researchers obliged. As a result, the study reports on the three lessons that were video-recorded at the school and the informal discussions relating to their four lessons held afterwards with each teacher.

Cooperation willingly given seemed to be the only way to obtain reliable data. What prompted the researchers' use of a self-selected sample was the fact that they had no other means of persuading teachers to participate in the study. This is mentioned merely to explain that forcing participation by a teacher who had initially agreed to be involved in the study and subsequently decided to withdraw would have resulted in a higher level of unreliability, especially as teachers were required to provide information on normal practice and to engage in a time-consuming reflective process. This teacher's unwillingness to participate in the reflective process clearly revealed the problems researchers were likely to face in undertaking further research in an effort to uncover teachers' perceptions of their practice.

To avoid systematic bias it was decided not to try to persuade the teacher or involve her in the interview process on the basis of her other lessons, because there was no way of ascertaining the information provided on these lessons would shed light on what she would have considered important when teaching the lesson that would have been reported on in this article. For her contribution to have been reliable and valid, she needed to have taught the lesson, had the researchers observe it and finally accounted for her strategies whilst watching its recording. In this situation, cooperation willingly given was the only way of proceeding. As Galtung (1967) explained, dealing with the problem of refusal in this manner could not invalidate the data provided by the other teachers because this study was testing by means of data a 'substantive hypothesis' about reality – identifying contradictions between the aims of the syllabus and teachers' actions within the classroom, understood as an activity system, could reveal something about the changes that were necessary for the syllabus aims to be successfully implemented – and not trying to test a 'generalisation hypothesis' about data.

Each interview lasted about 90 minutes and was recorded on an audio tape-recorder. Responses were used to identify the teachers' disciplinary assumptions when talking about their teaching of History. Questions asked focused on these assumptions to probe the teachers' motivation for using particular strategies and aids, ways in which they were used, facilitating specific roles for students and themselves and motives for acting as they did on the aims of the syllabus. It was important to gain greater understanding of these assumptions so as to be in a position to note the subtler nuances in them (cf. Brown and Dowlings 1998). Through probing and providing prompts it was possible to get teachers to participate in the study as communicants and not as interviewees, and clarify the essence of these assumptions. This made it possible to identify trends in their responses.

### **Data management and analysis**

Once the data had been collected, it was systematically organised into units of meaning and then summarised into thematic patterns. The insights of Cazden (1988) on classroom discourse analysis and those of Fairclough (1992, 2003) on critical discourse analysis were drawn upon to capture the subtleties and complexities in the teachers' accounts. The themes are used to present and analyse the data in the next section of the article.

The activities and aids used during the lessons indicated that they were mediated mainly by input processes influenced by what would be acceptable within their context. Norms of conduct within this context seemed to have imposed the rules of behaviour on the teachers. Rules determining cultural rituals could not be questioned or contradicted: a need to comply influenced what teachers did. They spoke about their actions as being in agreement with culturally accepted ways of behaving in Swaziland. However, the actions as captured on the video recordings demonstrated contradictions

between the demands of the syllabus and what the teachers perceived to be non-negotiable as norms of conduct in Swaziland. The contradictions are unravelled by examining how the teacher encourages the students to talk about the cultural rituals during the lesson. Eager not to undermine these rituals, the teacher seemed to believe that encouraging students to describe them as they have been practised over time would help further develop their appreciation, clarify what distinguished the Swazis as a people and strengthen the desire to hold onto these rituals. A detailed discussion of the teacher's promotion of those rituals she considered to be part of the activity system she and the students inhabited and not to be undermined follows.

### **Uncritical stance towards rituals as lesson content**

Education authorities in Swaziland emphasise that teaching History has to promote, amongst other factors, critical thought. It therefore seemed reasonable to the researchers that teachers would understand the reasons for teaching History at junior certificate level that were promoted in their national curriculum and its associated teaching procedures.

In a lesson aimed at nurturing national identity through History, teachers unquestioningly used the cultural rituals provided as examples by the syllabus as tools or aids to develop strategies that fulfilled the requirements of the syllabus. At all times they ensured that rules governing proper behaviour in their country were not violated. They taught in ways that reflected what they took for granted as a respectable way of engaging Swazi cultural rituals and seemed to believe that asking students to describe these rituals would help strengthen their regard for the rituals as what distinguished the Swazis as a people, develop an appreciation for these rituals and strengthen the desire to nurture them further. They asked students to explain the significance of the *Umhlanga* or Reed Dance (cutting reeds and delivering them to the Queen Mother, followed by a traditional dance) for young girls, *Lusekwane* (cutting of the *lusekwane* tree) for young boys, and *Incwala* (celebration of first harvest led by older men).

In all instances students had to report on the projects they had to do as homework. The discussions that ensued amongst the groups in each of the lessons concentrated on explaining the procedures that had to be followed in these rituals, their purpose and the roles of the different participants. For instance, during the Reed Dance, young girls are sent out to cut reeds at selected rivers, normally about 40 km from the king's kraal for grown-up girls and a shorter distance for young ones. They bring large reeds to the Queen Mother's residence to be used later to repair her kraal. They are given time to rest before the day of dancing and then disperse to their homes. *Incwala* celebrates national unity and it has different stages. The initial stage (Small *Incwala*) is only for selected individuals and royalty. Six days before the start of the full *Incwala*, young men are sent to gather branches of the *Lusekwane* tree, from which a bower is built for the king. These rituals, especially the Reed Dance and *Lusekwane*,

provide education about social sanctions, in particular a prohibition on premarital sexual relations.

As educational knowledge, the cultural rituals taught at school would have been, according to Gramsci (1971), considered on the basis of the teachers' common-sense valuable to enhance the value of the political structures that promoted allegiance to the monarchy and ensured the centralisation of its power and the cultural beliefs and practices it upholds. This was the subject content that was provided in the syllabus and taken for granted as symbolising what is culturally essential to preserve and maintain a Swazi identity. The content had to be drawn on to produce 'revolutionising praxis' and develop critical inquiry and understanding of these rituals as part of the heritage of the Swazi nation, thus using curriculum content to promote understanding through what Pinar et al. (1995) call an 'autobiographical text'.

The researchers expected to see the self-reflective stance required by this notion of the curriculum in the teachers' lessons. However, in observed lessons that had as an aim 'nurturing of a national identity through History', teachers uniformly taught cultural rituals uncritically. For them, learning cultural rituals as educational content meant helping students remember what needed to be done when performing them. Students had to explain how the rituals were performed and then point out their significance to the way in which their society was organised. Interestingly, while the explanations were passionate, they were no questions that reflected curiosity about how they became institutionalised. The outline below reflects one of the observed lessons in which the contradictions with the aims of the syllabus were quite manifest.

In the classroom in which the lesson was conducted students were divided into three groups of 10 to 12 students. The first looked at *Umhlanga*, the next *Lusekwane* and the last *Incwala*. However, when the lesson began it became clear that the last group had nothing to say because at their age the boys who had to do a project on this ritual would not be allowed to participate in it. *Incwala* generally involves mature, older men. The teacher then had to distribute members of the group equally into the other two, making two large groups of 16.

### **Group 1: Group discussing the Reed Dance**

The teacher introduced the lesson by posing the question: 'Tell us what you do and what you like during this time?'

S1: We should start by telling them that we all have to assemble at the chief's kraal, where we are given a code of conduct.

S2: It is important that when we go to *Lobamba* we go as a community under one chief.

S3: Yes, that is why we are transported by government and not individual transport.

S4: We can only go for cutting the reeds after being dispersed by people representing royalty.

S5: We are told where to go for cutting reeds and this is according to our age groups. Young maidens go to closer areas because everybody should walk, there are no provisions for transport.

S2: I enjoy the walking in a group and meeting new people.

S4: I think we also learn a lot from other girls in terms of new traditional songs and dance styles.

S6: Yes, we sing and dance all the time, but even more interesting is dancing the day when the whole nation comes to watch.

S3: I like the way we dress up, it is time to show that we have not been engaging in sex and this encourages us to respect our bodies ... (discussion continues).

## **Group 2: Group discussing the cutting of the *lusekwane* tree**

In this group *Lusekwane* was discussed in the following manner:

S1: Let us not talk about or describe what we do because most people know it.

S2: What else can we talk about?

S3: That it helps us develop qualities that will make our parents proud of us.

S2: Yes, the things that will make people see that we are Swazis.

S4: But what are these things you are talking about?

S1: We have to show respect and listen to elders.

S5: Yes, because all the time the boys have to take orders from the leaders.

S2: It also encourages us to stay away from premarital sex, otherwise the shrubs will dry up and if they do the other boys are going to beat you and we all do not want that to happen to us.

S3: It is also about strength, as we have to walk long distances and look after ourselves, it is like we are becoming men.

S1: We must not forget that it makes us proud to work for the king and the country.

[The bell rings and students get ready for an English lesson – we leave the classroom.]

The conversations that occurred focused uncritically on descriptive detail. The interaction that occurred between the teacher and the students and amongst the students themselves did not encourage the posing of new questions about the cultural rituals. Rather than the teacher encouraging students to reflect critically on what they took for granted as the value of these rituals, her introduction to the lesson gave the impression that she expected everyone in the class to like these rituals. She seemed unaware that as cultural historical knowledge they needed critical understanding. Students' personal experience of these rituals had to serve as a resource for the reflective processes the teacher should have initiated as a way of promoting the intellectual and personal development expected by the syllabus. In short, a lesson that provided students with opportunities to acquire the knowledge and skills associated with Critical History should have explained the ambiguity in the notion of being 'Swazi'. However, because the teacher avoided this – whether unwittingly or otherwise

– the contradictions between the demands of the syllabus and what she emphasised in her teaching compromised the intellectual development that would have ensured that the meanings related to cultural rituals are questioned and political forces behind them explained in such a manner that students understood why the rituals have been kept over time. This would have enabled them to understand how the monarchy was sustained and maintained through these rituals (cf. Gramsci 1971).

One of the aims of the syllabus – ‘develop an awareness ... which have led to the social, economic and political situation ...’ – required, for example, that these rituals as historical knowledge be taught through a process of autobiographical reflection (cf. Pinar 2004) involving a regressive activity that returned students to the past to clarify how it (past) impinged on their present. Following the process with one that helped them imagine a future, envision possibilities and discern where meditative images might lead them in their country would have been more educative and contributed to meeting the aims of the syllabus. The approach would have enhanced an understanding of the specific conditions under which the rituals were institutionalised (cf. Thompson 1990) and the reasons they had continued to be mediated in particular ways over time to suit a context that they had come to take for granted as Swazi.

Coupling biographical detail with the intellectual would have repositioned students in a private-public space and set in motion positions from which they could experience and, perhaps, surpass the present to envision a future in which they would not be expected to embrace rituals slavishly. By synthesising different opinions expressed in the lesson, the teacher would have enabled them to formulate questions that encouraged them to reflect on the rituals and begin developing an ability to interpret them as historical content that continued being one of the sources from which they had to draw to define what distinguished them as Swazi. It was important to clarify how the rituals were contributing to the social, economic and political situation in Swaziland and the reasons they had to continue serving the purpose for which they were institutionalised. Indeed, the aims of the syllabus explicitly stated that this was an awareness that had to be developed and had to start with the students’ immediate environment and be developed to encompass Africa and the world.

Engestrom (2001; Engestrom, Miettinen and Pumamaki 2003) argues that activities/human practices can be well understood against the background of the entire activity system as part of their social matrix. It is therefore reasonable to conclude that teachers used artefacts and tools that were in agreement with their common-sense and developed a learning process that was also typical of what they assumed was the social matrix of which they and their students were part. When asked to account for the activities or strategies they used, the teachers argued that allowing the learners to describe cultural rituals generated excitement and interest in rituals as part of who they were, and this was necessary for nurturing a national identity that strengthened knowledge of their society. The next section of this article provides a more detailed analysis to illustrate how their teaching was a product of an

activity system that was a source of who they were and considered crucial to their making, i.e. themselves and students.

### **Teaching as a product of an activity system inhabited**

The teachers explained the purpose of their strategies as part of the consolidation of who they considered themselves to be as Swazis:

Teacher 1: Since the enthronement of Sobhuza I the country has considered it important that children be taught what is done when participating in these cultural ceremonies. That's who they are.

Researcher: Why do people need to know what is done in the cultural ceremonies?

Teacher: Because they will know who they are by doing what represents them as a people. This is custom. Every people have their ways of doing things. They can relate to their culture by themselves rather than wait for the teacher to tell them. I tell them that we are on an identity-finding mission and they (students) also show interest in knowing about these things.

Teacher 2: History is a very useful subject because through being able to tell what is done in these ceremonies you show that you know who you are, where you come from and who are your ancestors ...

Researcher: Yes, but how does this contribute towards a self-knowledge?

Teacher: Embedded in these ceremonies is their culture, what their ancestors did and believed in and from this students can see how they are not only different from other societies but how their society is organised and unique in terms of the rituals it follows. Engaging them in small groups for discussions and emphasising that each student should express what she knows about these rituals is a way of arousing interest to know how society is organised in the country.

Teacher 3: This is knowledge about their background.

Researcher: What is the significance of this background?

Teacher: They will know their culture and as a result who they are. This is what the royalty intended when they, I mean the king's kraal, first made sure that these rituals are practised. They have to be familiar with these rituals and their value in this nation. Then they can be proud to be Swazi when they know the good to be gained by practising these rituals.

In the light of Engeström's views it is reasonable to conclude that these views were representations that can be understood as reflecting the teachers' interpretations and meanings that have been promoted by their history, experiences, skills, resources and context (also see Ball 1993). They could not understand what the syllabus proposed in isolation from the social context for which it was meant. Therefore, trying to understand these views in context required the researchers to identify what the teachers considered as appropriate for serving the wider community's interests, avoiding conflict with authorities and what might be viewed as resistance to certain forms of authority. This understanding manifested itself not only in their behaviour, but also in how they spoke about the rituals. As a result, contrary to what was

expected by education authorities, there seemed to be a close relationship between the manner in which the aims of the syllabus were spoken about and what the teachers took for granted as important values and traditions to pass on to the students. Therefore, seeing teachers' common-sense as a construct that could be politically influenced through a syllabus as symbolic policy tool might have been informed by an ill-conceived stance that the new sets of circumstances it prescribed would serve to clarify the behavioural changes that were expected from teachers and motivate them to act accordingly. Being aware of the hard realities of the context in which they taught, it could be that they viewed the aims as expectations that were potentially dangerous (Giddens 1990) and needed to be avoided. If this is true, these teachers are likely to continue to misinterpret the aims of the syllabus unless they are exposed to circumstances that challenge their common-sense and motivate them to act in a manner that reflects the 'revolutionising praxis' promoted by the syllabus. Unless they are enabled to disrupt cultural institutions in their context, the aims of teaching History will remain unattainable.

## Conclusion

Studying teachers' activities and practices revealed how their environment seemed to influence the manner in which they structured their teaching. As local context, it imposed rules of engagement with the aims of the syllabus. The discrepancy that was evident between the essence of these aims and how they were translated into practice would not have been understood without coupling an analysis of what they did with their explanations. Using a dual method of inquiry as a design format afforded the researchers invaluable insights, indicating clearly that unless relevant resources that can alter the context in which the teachers function are made available to them, it will be difficult for them to acquire the professional knowledge and skills they need to teach critical thinking confidently as required by the syllabus for History in the country. For Swaziland to implement the new History syllabus effectively, teachers need to be re-socialised. The benefits gained from setting such a process in motion are bound to filter through into other societal structures.

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# The Challenge of Learning: Improving the Quality of Basic Education in Sub-Saharan Africa: Quality, Equality and Democracy

David Johnson (ed.). 2008. Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press. ISBN 978-1-873927-11-3.

*Reviewed by Hlengani Baloyi*

This book focuses on educational quality, equality and democracy in the African context, in particular sub-Saharan Africa. Critical issues that impact, directly or indirectly, on education quality are raised in the book. These include low quality of education in sub-Saharan Africa despite meaningful improvements in access to education, gender inequality in education, the need to use the mother tongue in teaching and learning and persistent inequalities between the previously disadvantaged and advantaged schools. These are important issues, some of which are hotly debated within current educational debates. There is no doubt that the book comes at the right time, seeking to address educational challenges bedevilling our education systems in Africa. This then adds value to the publication.

Despite the different styles in which individual studies (chapters) are presented in this publication, the book is educational, inspiring and stimulating. It raises some critical judgements on educational issues. Except for the last chapter (chapter 8), the chapters are, one way or another, interconnected. Although the chapters present different individual perspectives, they focus on addressing the bigger challenge: educational quality. Generally, chapters are well-structured and well-written. Most of the chapters are based on empirical evidence. The book will be useful to teachers, researchers, school managers, students, parents, education funders, education ministries, teacher unions and other relevant stakeholders. Despite some shortcomings, which are dealt with below, the publication does have value and will definitely make a contribution towards a better understanding of the issues raised.

Weaknesses identified in this book are in two categories, namely technical gaps and scholarship challenges. There are a few technical errors, such as an instance of repetition and the failure by one author to provide the source of a graph. Although small technical errors, they spoil the flow of the text.

A number of scholarship challenges are also identified in this book. The first is a lack of empirical evidence to support claims made by some authors, for instance the argument of the continued dominance of masculinity by Unterhalter (chapter 5). Statistical evidence indicating gender inequality in the education world would go a long way

towards backing up the claim raised by this author. The second scholarship challenge stems from the mentioning of names of schools and individual participants in some studies, as seen in some chapters (e.g. chapters 6 and 7), which raises serious ethical concerns owing to the fact that the publication is available for public consumption. This also compromises participants' right to confidentiality, particularly since no mention is made of participants consenting to this arrangement.

Addressing issues that are irrelevant to the theme of the book is the third challenge identified. This comes out in chapter 7, where the author focuses on the culture of the Khoisan people and their traditional way of dealing with illness or outbreaks of disease. This is an important matter that cannot be disputed from a cultural point of view. However, this chapter appears rather dislocated, as it makes no point about quality, equality or democracy in education.

In conclusion, the book provides an interesting set of chapters, but is not without weaknesses.

## ■ Contents of previous issues of SARE

### Volume 14(3)

Editors' introduction

#### Articles

In(sites): Examining early literacy practices at home and school in rural Malawi and South Africa

Kerrun Dixon, Jean Place and Foster Kholowa

Language policy, classroom practice and concept learning in a Grade One Tshivenda classroom

Azwihangwisi Muthivhi

Postcards from the edge: Exploring multi-modal strategies for reconciliation pedagogy

Ana Ferreira

Children of democracy: Teaching for democracy in early childhood classrooms in South Africa

Lorayne Excell and Vivien Linington

The gender sensitivity of Zimbabwean secondary school textbooks

Dudu T Washington, Jairos Gonye, Rugare Mareva and Jabulani Sibanda

The history of Biology as a school subject and developments in the subject in contemporary South Africa

Lesley le Grange

Double-shift schooling: Motives for implementation in Namibia and Uganda

Godfrey Kleinhans

Caught in ideological crossfire: Private schooling in South Africa

Shireen Motala and Veerle Dieltens

#### Book review

George Makubalo on Andre Kraak and Karen Press (eds), *HRD Review 2008* (Cape Town: HSRC Press)

### Volume 14(1-2)

#### *Special Edition on Teacher Education in Southern Africa*

#### Articles

Teacher education in the Latin American Region: An unfinished business?

Beatrice Avalos

Critical perspectives on teacher education in neo-liberal times: Experiences from Ethiopia and Namibia

Lars Dahlstrom and Brook Lemma

Learning to teach in post-devolution United Kingdom: A technical or an ethical process?

Moire Hulme and Ian Menter

A comparison of Ugandan, English and German teacher education models

Proscovia Ssemamu-Namubiru

Trajectories of restructuring : The changing context for initial teacher education in South Africa

Glenda Kruss

Who are we missing? Teacher graduate production in South Africa 1995-2006

Andrew Paterson and Fabian Arendse

Towards collaboration rather than co-operation for effective teacher professional development in South Africa: Insights from social practice theory

Suriamurthee Moonsamy Maistry

The practicum in pre-service teacher education: A survey of institutional practices

Chris Reddy, Hannie Menkveld and Eli Bitzer

Keeping abreast of changing times and demands in education: Implications for teacher education in South Africa

Fanie Pretorius

### **Book reviews**

Peter Kallaway on David Labaree, *The Trouble with Ed Schools* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004)

Salim Vally and Carol Spreen on Everard Weber, *Teaching in the New South Africa at Merridale High School* (Lanham, ML.: University Press of America, 2006)

### **Volume 13(2)**

#### **Articles**

Lessons from the past two decades: Investment choices for education and growth

Martin Carnoy

Aid agency support for education: Gaps between intention and action

Christopher Colclough

Why some Education For All and Millennium Development Goals will not be met: Difficulties with goals and targets

Keith M Lewin

The role of donors and civil society organisations in the education sector of Malawi.  
Joseph Chimombo

Harnessing private monies to fuel university growth: A case study of Makerere University  
Bidemi Carroll

Education, skills, sustainability and growth: Complex relations  
Kenneth King

Decentralizing and revitalizing school-based teacher support and continuous professional development at the primary school level: Why it has failed in East Africa  
Akim Okuni

The developmental state in Africa  
Dani W Nabudere

### **Book review**

Matseleng Allais on Elaine Unterhalter, *Gender, Schooling and Global Social Justice*. (London and New York: Routledge, 2007)

## **Volume 13(1)**

### ***Special Issue on Assessment and Educational Standards***

Preface by the guest editor

Acknowledgements

### **Articles**

Making our own modernity: Standards, values and benchmarks in the African school in the age of globalization  
Crain Soudien

'Local knowledge', assessment and international standards  
Kai Horsthemke

Piloting school-based assessment at middle-basic level: The Zambian experience  
Gabriel Mweemba and Michael Chilala

Standards-based educational reform and its implication for school-based assessment: lessons from Zimbabwean schools  
Francis Chirume

Standards – a couple of steps back  
Mark Potterton

### **Book review**

Jeffy Mukora on Michael Young and Jeanne Gamble (eds), *Knowledge, Curriculum*

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## **Volume 12(2)**

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Notes from the Editor

#### **Articles**

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Sheldon Weeks, Harold Herman, Rouaan Maarman and Charl Wolhuter

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Charl Wolhuter

The institutionalization of comparative education discourses in South Africa in the 20th century

Anne-Marie Bergh and Crain Soudien

Globalization, knowledge, skills and development: Possible new directions for international and comparative education research in Southern Africa

Simon McGrath

Knowing others and knowing self: Patterns of differentiated publishing in education journals from the North and South

Karen Biraimah

## **Volume 12(1)**

Notes from the Editor

#### **Articles**

Sociolinguistic research and academic freedom in Malawi: Past and current trends

Gregory Hankoni Kamwendo

Contextualizing identity in comparative studies after the demise of national character

Susara Berkhout

A hybrid identity among the Sukuma in the Tanzanian Africa Inland Mission

Fabian Maganda

Teacher learning: Development in and with social context

Lynne Slonimsky and Karin Brodie

The academic profession in South Africa

Charl Wolhuter and Leonie Higgs

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### **Volume 11**

Notes from the Editor

#### **Articles**

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GM Steyn and N Ncube

Professional identity and misconduct: Perspectives of Tanzanian teachers

Angeline Barrett and William Angisiye

Teacher power and student resistance to radical pedagogies

Juliet Perumal

Racial discourse in the Commission on Native Education: The making of Bantu identity

Crain Soudien

#### **Research note**

Alternative basic education in Uganda

Hannah Kakembo

#### **Debate and discussion**

The challenge for education in these times: War, terror and social justice

Salim Vally

### **Volumes 9 and 10**

Notes from the Editor

**Articles**

Further education and training in South Africa  
Azeem Badroodien and Peter Kallaway

Building a quality college sector for the twenty-first century  
Simon McGrath

Increasing access to education  
CWS Sukati and Chandraiah Esampally

Defining competence in student teaching  
Rob Siebörger and Geoffrey Quick

Description of a course on research management at a university in New Zealand  
CC Wolhuter, K Naidoo, L Sutherland and G Peckham

The development of minority languages for adult literacy  
Lydia Nyati-Ramahobo and Andy Chebanne

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Comfort BS Mndebele and Zamokuhle Dlamini

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Alan Wieder

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**Books noted/Books received by SARE with EWP**

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Glenda Kruss, *Chasing Credentials and Mobility: Private Higher Education in South Africa* (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2004)

Robert A LeVine, *Childhood Socialization: Comparative Studies of Parenting, Learning and Educational Change* (Hong Kong: Comparative Education Research Centre, 2003)



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Southern African Review of Education (SARE) is the journal of the Southern African Comparative and History of Education Society (SACHES). It was previously published together with **Education with Production** (EWP), the journal of the Foundation for Education with Production.

**SARE** will appear at least once a year. Contributors are welcome to submit articles on educational issues with specific reference to educational policy, comparative education, sociology of education, history of education and education with production.

Beginning with Volume 5 in 1999, articles submitted will be anonymously refereed. Articles are accepted on the understanding that they have **not** been published or submitted for publication elsewhere. Articles or review essays should not be longer than 8 000 words and may include maps, figures and tables. Reports on research, book reviews and critical comments should be limited to 2 000 words.

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Footnotes are *not required* ('If it is worth saying, say it in the text, or not at all'). Please cite material in the text as follows: (Hirson 1979: 9) or (Kahn 1997: 202) or (Swartz 1993: 181) or (Brock 1974: 186; Bray & Steward 1998: 66).

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# Contents

<b>EDITORIAL</b>	3
<b>ARTICLES</b>	
Zacchaeus Bukari and Loyiso Jita <i>Partnerships for educational development in Africa: Evidence from Japanese professional development programmes for science teachers in Ghana and South Africa</i>	7
Vitallis Chikoko and Lydia Aiping <i>The school cluster system as an educational reform: Evidence from Namibia and Zimbabwe</i>	25
Carol Bertram <i>Procedural and substantive knowledge: Some implications of an outcomes-based history curriculum in South Africa</i>	45
Robert Guyver <i>Towards a definition of protocols when embedding the national and the civic in a history curriculum</i>	63
Sofie Geschier <i>'Nobody says how people died of heartache!': Constructing a primary narrative in a pedagogical setting</i>	79
Rejoice Nsibande and Maropeng Modiba <i>Curriculum as a product of an activity system: Translating policy in the teaching of History</i>	97
<b>BOOK REVIEW</b>	
Hlengani Baloyi on <i>The Challenge of Learning: Improving the Quality of Basic Education in Sub-Saharan Africa: Quality, Equality and Democracy</i>	117
<b>SACHES MEMBERSHIP</b>	
SACHES membership form and information	44
<b>SACHES 2009</b>	
Annual Conference 2009	96
<b>SARE</b>	
Contents of previous issues of SARE	119
Notes to contributors	IBC