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“Mandela, the Terrorist.” Intended and Hidden History Curriculum in South Africa

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Abstract • This article focuses on how some aspects of the South African history curriculum are interpreted and “lived out” in two South African high schools. The article introduces the history curriculum reconstruction process and its surrounding developments since 1994 until the release of the National Curriculum Statement in 2003. It then focuses on the curricular intentions which reflect the reorganization of history teaching and serve as benchmark for teachers. Using empirical data gathered in Afrikaans schools, I describe how classroom practices represent the history curriculum. The data indicates that schools provide space for curriculum modification and the creation of a “hidden curriculum.”

Keywords • Afrikaner identity, classroom practice, curriculum reform, history education, outcomes-based education, South Africa

Background

When Nelson Mandela was elected South African president in 1994, expectations among the population for broad reforms and reconstructions were high. The public demand for change after forty-six years of apartheid affected the national education system like no other sphere in public life. This education system, icon and vehicle of suppression during apartheid, was politically identified as an important sphere that needed to be changed drastically – and in a manner visible to the population.

This article concentrates on the curriculum change for the school subject of history which had a particularly pernicious ideological role under apartheid. In contrast to most studies which almost exclusively focus on policy and textual analysis, this contribution intends to integrate empirical classroom practice insights. In the first part, the South African curriculum reform after 1994 is explicitly analyzed from a school history perspective. A concise overview of the political intentions and role-players is presented, and it is tried to recall the atmosphere of change during this time. Also,
I summarize changing concepts of the teacher profession. The introduction of the curriculum and its exciting past is important when talking about history classroom practices as the curriculum is supposed to serve as an orientation for teachers in term of contents, methodology and pedagogy. It must be considered that the connection between classroom practices and political conceptualization is not as separate as is sometimes assumed. The second part of the article looks at the actual departmental document and analyses important aims and intentions of the curriculum regarding the topic of apartheid. Samples of teaching practices which I was able to observe are introduced in part three. This last section discusses the curriculum’s practical application in two Afrikaans medium high schools on the basis of the example of teaching “resistance to apartheid.”

Overall, this article aims to contribute to the contextualization of curriculum reform with classroom practices, following van Eeden’s observation that “[...] empirical research or in-depth observation by research [...] regarding an assessment of the efficiency of the curriculum [...] as practiced in the classroom [...], are more or less absent with regard to the South African scenario and should receive attention in the near future.” The research questions guiding this article are: How was the new history curriculum developed and which problems did this reform cause? Which “gaps” between curricular intentions and practical applications occur in history classrooms? How is the application of curriculum reform modified in a particular Afrikaans environment and how do teachers and their personal experiences influence the learning process? Is curriculum reform an appropriate way to change history teaching at all?

Methodology

Following the logic of grounded theory, no limiting theoretical framework in a narrow sense is used initially, but the data is expected to generate theoretical explanations for underlying logics and systematics of the practices. The choice of a sample is not representative, but expected to generate insights and hence lay a theoretical foundation. Strauss and Glaser have named this approach in sampling a “comparative analysis.” All data was gathered by the means of participant observation, a rather inductive method, which underscores the role of the researcher and enables him or her to interpret impressions and perspectives. It is an ethnographic approach and does not claim objectivity but is aware that every single witness of the observed social interaction will find his or her own logic of analysis. The work of Geschier explored the possibilities offered by ethnography in South African history classroom settings, namely the narrative structures which appear to influence the history teaching process more than the curriculum.
This study is the first output of a research project, for which I observed several grade twelve history classes within a four-month period, and conducted interviews with learners, teachers and external experts in the field of history curriculum design, reform and evaluation as well as more overtly political role-players in the education system. All conversations followed the imperatives and logics of the field, meaning that all questionnaires were composed only after several visits to the respective schools. These interviews contributed different modes of representation.

In this study, two schools are used to exemplify modes of dealing with the past. I believe these schools and their communities, consisting mostly of white Afrikaans-speaking learners who classify themselves as “Afrikaners,” have a sensitive relation to how the history of apartheid is told and how Afrikaner identity is represented. At the same time, schools that are mostly attended by learners who identify themselves as not being white, applied different ways of speaking about apartheid. A comparative approach appears desirable, but also runs the risk of superficial cliché construction, hence the concentration on Afrikaans speaking high schools. The two examples are parts of data sets gathered in classrooms in Gauteng and Western Cape Province, and concentrate on microsociological insights into the teaching process. Both schools use Afrikaans as their language of instruction; all teachers and most learners are white. Both teachers completed four years of university training as history teachers, and both show passion for their profession. While School A’s teacher is female and in her late twenties, her male colleague at School B expects to retire within a few years. As there is nothing like the Afrikaans school, the given examples are also not regarded as representative, but allow an insight in teaching practices which help to understand the modes and symbols of interaction, and often implicit issues. It must be underlined that findings should therefore rather not be generalized. The research of teaching practices in history is still exploratory. Conducted studies include Mackie who described some learners’ attitude towards history, and Geschier who paid attention to the construction of primary narratives.

The extraordinary position of the Afrikaner population group, which is widely associated with support and perpetration of apartheid, must be considered. The relation of Afrikaners towards the state cannot be generalized, and as any South African population group this volk of three million people varies in aspects of education, language abilities and political views, and “Afrikaner identity is not a static entity which can be vacuum-packed or categorically delimited.” Many legends and myths about the Afrikaners’ self-perception and a collective identity have arisen and been deconstructed. This population group is, however, mostly seen as an entity which is currently striving for a new, non-racialised identity. Many Afrikaners adopt a rather critical attitude towards the “new” South Africa and struggle to balance their own identity with democratic re-
The general acceptance of the state among Afrikaners is fragile, not least because many feel their own values and traditions have suffered a decline and were harshly neglected. This feeling of “diminishing” can be found in the ways some Afrikaner teachers interpret the history curriculum, as will be shown later.

A New Curriculum

A number of authors have analyzed the reform of both the general and the history curriculum. Jansen appeared as one of the main critiques of the new policy and described these politically intended visible reforms as “symbols of change.” Fataar makes a similar point and speaks laconically of “the post-apartheid state’s make up.” Besides the dismissal of unequal chances and restricted admission to racially divided schools, the curriculum as a “corpus of cultural knowledge” served as a marker for change after 1994.

Some authors have criticized the governmental measures sharply, arguing that the country’s financial resources did not allow for such a major reform. Some of these studies also argued that South African teachers would not be educated sufficiently to implement such ambitious policies. Among others, the aforementioned Jansen considered the reform process particularly from a teachers’ perspective. Chisholm evaluated her own experiences as chair of different reform committees and underlined the general importance of history as a subject in a diverse schooling system. She made clear that the initial version of C 2005 let many teachers feel left out. Weldon combined an education departmental perspective with academic findings, reflected on the process as part of a post-conflict society and brought in a comparative perspective. Her point was to include teachers’ biographies as valuable resources for history teaching, but also made clear that these biographies and personal encounters need to be dealt with. Kros expressed concerns about history’s standing in schools and society, and whether history could survive as autonomous and enlightening discipline. With this concern, she was not alone, as many academic historians saw their subject in decline – both in school, in university and in public life. Siebörger engaged in the question of educational media and values in the classroom and pointed out, that history will be the only subject to include values and human rights teaching in the South African syllabus. Van Eeden raised questions concerning the agents of the reform process over history as a school subject, and spoke from a particular Afrikaner perspective.

For this contribution, it is important to differentiate between the general curriculum’s reform, and the reform of the history curriculum. It is
important to consider the developmental process of the curriculum reform when analyzing classroom practices as it reveals the controversial and multi-layered debates within South African society after 1994. These debates as a whole gave space for rethinking from the scratch, but also led to uncertainties about contents, methodology, and pedagogy. Weldon applies the metaphor of a “roller coaster of curriculum reform.”

Curriculum documents in South Africa serve generally as an important benchmark for teachers who face the challenges of applying new contents, and rely on curricula documents far more than on approved textbooks when planning their teaching. Consequently, Benavot and Resh describe its application as a “complex process of mutual adaption and accommodation by external actors, on the one hand, and local principles and teachers, on the other.”

Chisholm defines three stages in the general reform. A similar phase model can be found in Weldon’s work. The first phase aimed at the immediate “cleansing” of the curriculum and textbooks in 1995 to exclude the most obvious sexist and racist contents. During this initial review, it became clear that the South African education system as a whole not only needed some minor textbook revisions and its contents rearranging, but a general overhaul, also in terms of pedagogy and methodology. Influenced by Christian National Education standards, the apartheid policy was not only race-based, but also normative and subject to an authoritarian administration.

The 1995 curriculum had an explicitly interim character, maintained former methodological and pedagogical approaches and intended “to align the still functioning apartheid curriculum symbolically with the new democratic dispensation.” In general, policies were planned to keep the system stable, but visible changes seemed urgent in order to show the aforementioned symbols of change. Despite featured tensions that cannot be found in other subjects like maths or science, rather little attention was paid to the social sciences in general and history in particular during this initial debate in 1995. In the case of history, the interim curriculum was created almost exclusively by political administrators, while academic historians and educators, of whom many had been debating anti-apartheid historiographies before 1994, were not involved.

The implementation of “Curriculum 2005” (C 2005) in 1998, whose then futuristic name stated the intended year of final implementation, marked a drastic second phase within the reform process. It proclaimed Outcomes-Based Education (O.B.E.) as pedagogical and general assessment logic and solicited new methods and more applicable skills. The sensitive discussions about the interim solution led to a major public interest in the topic. C 2005 seemed to meet the requirements for both a new curriculum and pedagogical innovation and marked – unlike the interim curriculum of 1995 – a “dramatic departure from the apartheid curriculum.” This departure was on a practical level carried out.
by teachers of any racial background, most of whom had been educated during the apartheid years. Jansen describes how the teaching profession had to deal with new images, namely the new role as facilitator and performer. These were not always easy to apply. “Many classrooms have experienced the impact of these changes in dramatic form […], the pressure to implement a host of new policies, or reflect new entrepreneurial modes of conducting educational activities.”

Bam speaks of a time of “deadlines, white males with laptops, disks, alienated language and authoritarian voices that demanded ‘products’ by the hour.” Overseas experts were counseled to apply the O.B.E. model and set up “unlimited and somewhat unrealistic agendas.” All this happened mostly without participation of practitioners such as teachers.

South African trade unions, however, whose influence grew after 1994, supported the idea of skills to prepare young people better for the working world. Work-related skills and applicable outcomes promised economic growth and came into being in the context of a greater skills policy for the country.

The definition of relevant outcomes for all subjects was complicated, and the attempt to include all experts’ knowledge was rather hopeless. Overseas expertise was especially contested as it mostly failed to consider the specific South African conditions, ignoring local knowledge. “The technocrats (experts), including foreign consultants, hijacked the process at the expense of the role of practitioners.” In addition, the inapplicability of O.B.E. as part of C 2005 became clearer. Most teachers were not sufficiently prepared to re-arrange the skills-content relation, and struggled with new learner-centered teaching methods. A main point of critique was its difficult and sometimes diffuse language and the chaotic nature of the teacher-preparation workshops.

C 2005 received rather negative reactions from teachers who found the “dichotomy between skills and content […] entirely false” and “the language of O.B.E. and its associated structures […] too complex and inaccessible.” The heterogeneous teaching staff dealt with the reforms in different ways. Many black teachers supported the new government’s initiative that marked a drastic political change, while many white teachers in private and progressive schools identified C 2005 as critical and learner-centered learning and something they felt they had been doing before anyway, without having labeled it as such.

For history, a major consequence of C 2005 was the merging with geography to form the “Learning Area Social Science,” alongside a general shift from content dominance to the promotion of applicable skills. Methodologically, project work and learner-centeredness were proposed as innovations for history teaching. With C 2005, the relation of contents and skills in history teaching appeared to be dichotomous; the integration of both spheres influences curriculum planning until today. The
advancement of skills instead of contents led to a quite limited systematic or chronological teaching of history, but only exemplary application of past events.\textsuperscript{44} Regulated assessment modes enjoyed upgraded attention in order to standardize schooling. Academic historians saw an “end of history”\textsuperscript{45} and feared that the general interest in history after 1994 would continuously decrease.

After its implementation in the first school grades with unsatisfying results in 1997, it became clear that C 2005 would soon appear tarnished.\textsuperscript{46} The new education administration under Minister Kader Asmal advanced the installation of a revision unit, which Chisholm calls the third phase of the general curriculum reform. The committee was not supposed to review O.B.E. and C 2005 in general\textsuperscript{47} – which would have diminished the impact of the former Minister of Education, Sibusiso Bengu – but to identify specific problems for specific subjects in detail.\textsuperscript{48} The committee recommended improved teacher training and teaching material, more gradual implementation and better provision of workshops on O.B.E.\textsuperscript{49} The committee decreased the former almost exclusive focus on skills and outcomes, not least since the minister “had put leftist elements such as unions and civic movements on the ideological retreat.”\textsuperscript{50} Cross et al. still do not see major progress and claim that, “There is however another sense in which the South African experience can be read. This is perhaps related to what its modes of educational borrowing certainly did not do: learn from mistakes and failures.”\textsuperscript{51}

In the case of history, the committee criticized the marginalization of the subject, defining it as an important subject for human rights education (and therefore reconciliation) of the nation.\textsuperscript{52} Therefore, history was re-installed as an autonomous subject and the curriculum rebalanced in terms of contents and skills knowledge. The language of the curriculum documents was simplified, and the number of preparatory teacher workshops increased. Despite good intentions, many history teachers remained entirely confused, as the changes arrived in staff rooms with some delay and – in spite of better teaching materials and guidelines for teachers – many were simply not capable of engaging with the complex contents of the history curriculum documents.\textsuperscript{53}

During this phase of the curriculum reform process, Afrikaner academic professionals and teachers generally felt excluded and had the impression that their history-related expertise and academic knowledge “were labeled as the bastions of the apartheid oppression period.”\textsuperscript{54} A similar point is made by Visser who states that many Afrikaners now feel distanced from the country’s community and find themselves struggling with their new diminished position. The notion of exclusion from the mentioned curriculum reform process and hence a powerless position in the struggle for new histories is of great importance for the classroom practices discussed later. Visser summarized the situation by writing that “Afrikaners accepted
that black history should find its rightful place in the national discourse, but did not expect to see Afrikaner history almost criminalized.\textsuperscript{55}

**Teacher Profession**

It is important to focus on the image of teachers in public schools in order to understand the data. Baxen and Soudien have explored the practical meaning of identity re-construction for teachers. The time-based political urge to find one’s new positions “is a strategic conditioning device which privileges some and disadvantages others. [...] Identities of deficiency are projected for those unable to operate within these parameters.”\textsuperscript{56} This means that teachers who struggled with their new roles were often labeled as unwilling or unable. Jansen suggests there has been a shift from a teacher image as a liberator to that of a facilitator within the reform process, which even extended to the role of the teacher as a performer. Every phase of the reconstruction process produced new white papers and policy strategies, and “every education policy document contains powerful images of the idealized teacher.”\textsuperscript{57} This new teacher type was not only able to handle content changes, but also acted as methodologically innovative. The aforementioned liberation function refers to traditional ideas of the African National Congress (A.N.C.) in order to open up the learners’ minds to knowledge that could only unrealistically be implemented in the diverse South African school system.\textsuperscript{58} Ideally, the teacher represents the state, and his or her work is transformed into a mentally liberating process. In the South African context, liberation was more political than pedagogical, and the term remained vague. This teacher image was transformed into that of a facilitator. In this post-apartheid understanding of the profession teachers almost disappeared in the self-steering ideals of C 2005 which gave power to pupils – who in turn were from now on called “learners.” The teachers served as hosts; allowing students to explore knowledge themselves in a learner-centered pedagogy as they were provided “with a simple hanger on which to peg their understanding.”\textsuperscript{59} Somewhat the traditional core business declined. “The facilitator as imagined in policy lost ground in terms of symbolic space, physical control and textual authority.”\textsuperscript{60} Though many teachers, no matter from which ethnic or educational background, did not identify with this teacher image, comprehension became a sign of progress.\textsuperscript{61} Hence it is not surprising that teachers want to affirm their power in the classroom by applying the curriculum with respect to their own persuasions, as the empirical examples will demonstrate. This state-based image-control of the teacher ironically continued the mode in which the apartheid administration defined the profession in terms of apartheid’s Christian National Education. Van Eeden states that, “A political dominance in the educational approach that should be
followed in general and in History does not differ in any way from the enforced trends traceable in South Africa prior to 1994 (known as the apartheid period).\textsuperscript{62}

C 2005 underlined the importance of outcomes, meaning measurable results in classrooms. In the logic of C 2005, teachers were supposed to perform and provide knowledge for the exclusive good of skills, as the curriculum points out that, “Content must serve the learning outcomes [=skills, HH] and not be an end in itself.”\textsuperscript{63} Any results in schools were considered to be the achievement of teachers – and any failure as their fault. Accordingly, the responsibility of society itself was diminished, and teachers were faced with a “complex, difficult, demanding, unrealistic, exhausting, […] impossible”\textsuperscript{64} expectation which left them alone both in terms of profession and biographical knowledge. Weldon has ascertained these difficulties with regard to departmental initiatives, namely supervised teacher workshops, in which Western Cape educators of diverse ethnic, local and social backgrounds explored their own biographical knowledge and experience in the context of apartheid. Weldon pointed out that “the majority of educators (teachers, advisers, policy makers) ten years into democracy, are still the generation of victims and perpetrators,”\textsuperscript{65} and calls for special attention to these circumstances. One of these initiatives was observed by Tibbitts, who pointed out not only the need of introduction to the new curriculum, but also the biography-based dimension. The author described the demand of storytelling by the teachers which is needed to “directly facilitate teachers’ grappling with their own histories during the apartheid era in order to be prepared to address the topic in the classroom with some distance and insight.”\textsuperscript{66} Following Weldon and Tibbitts, these workshops were successful, despite (or perhaps as a result of) the fact that the participating teachers formed a very heterogeneous group.

The curriculum itself summarizes the desired roles of the teacher, and any form of confusion on the teachers’ side appears somehow understandable when reading the list of professional expectation. This list “include[s] being mediators of learning, interpreters and designers of Learning Programmes and materials, leaders, administrators and managers, scholars, researchers and lifelong learners, community members, citizens and pastors, assessors and subject specialists.”\textsuperscript{67}

**Curricular Intentions in History**

As shown, the new history curriculum underwent a process of major change after 1994 in terms of its goals and aspirations. The sixty-three-page document covers grade ten, eleven and twelve, and states the wish to “heal the divisions of the past and establish a society based on
democratic values." The role of history is defined in a quite normative way, which seems to follow the recommendations of the Review Committee that are summarized by Chisholm. The definition is followed by a description of the new outcomes-based approach. The latter is rather general and one feels the pertinence of Jansen’s description of symbols of change, as the tenor connects the national constitution with society, and society with the curriculum.

As this will be the topic of the periods observed, I draw attention to a crucial part of the curriculum, namely apartheid and resistance to it. Here, the document speaks quite explicitly about the “civil society protest that emerged from the 1960s up to 1990.” “The Struggle”, as it is often called in South Africa, is mentioned in a rather one-dimensional way. No contentious aspects of this protest are marked, such as inter-ethnic conflicts or militant contention in the 1980s and 1990s. The ambivalent role of the African National Congress is also neglected. Additionally, apartheid is introduced as general “crisis,” and “facing the future” is described as highly problematic, and historical knowledge is named a “construction.”

In an interview I conducted with Cynthia Kros, a professor of heritage studies, she appreciated this constructivist approach in the curriculum but mentioned that these rather abstract ideas are hard to apply in a country where most people have had highly concrete experiences of sensitive matters such as race, racism, social class and gender. The latest history curriculum does not really give directions to the teacher wishing to implement it, but asks constructivist questions that appear to be rather imprecise. The majority of South African teachers will and does struggle with these “radical changes in behavior and beliefs that the new curriculum demands.”

In terms of methodology the curriculum’s sister document “National Curriculum Statement Learning Programme Guidelines History” gives rather little information about how to actually teach and which methodological activities are appropriate for history classrooms. It advises the teacher to “consider individual past experiences, learning styles and preferences; develop questions and activities that are aimed at different levels of activity; provide opportunity for a variety of participation levels such as individual, pair and small group activities.” In essence, the curriculum has different foci: besides the general framing of the document and a fairly moral introduction to the role of history within school subjects, the reader recognizes an almost exclusive concentration on the definition of learning outcomes and assessment standards, and their respective methods and implications. The contents of history as their core business are discussed only very briefly. The document defines its contents for three grades on as few as ten pages altogether. It states that, “Content must serve the Learning Outcomes and not be an end in itself,” which is probably the most significant difference from the old curriculum which placed
emphasis on contents. Besides the idealized idea of history as a way to “contribute constructively to society and to advance democracy,”78 economically applicable historical skills are identified as a purpose of history teaching.79 For example the curriculum underlines that, “History qualifications can […] lead to future careers in management and administration, marketing, public relations and the media.”80 However, even though the curriculum states that an “education system does not exist to simply serve a market,”81 Kros identified an “abandonment of history in the pursuit of overblown civic ideals and fantastic dreams of entrepreneurship.”82

1. Applying the Curriculum in the Classroom

The final part of this article introduces two examples of history teaching in the two aforementioned Afrikaans-medium high schools. The observed periods dealt with “Apartheid and resistance to it.” I chose this topic as I assumed it would provide space for personal engagement and debating, as all teachers and most children in South Africa can somehow relate to the topic.

The first example observed is the representation of the ruling African National Congress (A.N.C.) in class. It is not surprising that both teachers tended to display a negative attitude towards the stance of the A.N.C., perceived as quasi-communist and anti-capitalist. Giliomee described the dismissal of socialist or communist approaches among many white South Africans.83 School A’s teacher underlines the left-wing background of the A.N.C., and uses codes such as Rusland or kommunisties that are quite unpopular among young Afrikaners.

Learner: Miss, was the A.N.C. communist?
Teacher A: Yes, sure! The A.N.C. is still communist! They believed in the communist system, and during the Cold War Russia financed the A.N.C. to be on their side. If Russia got South Africa […] and this is why our parents went to the borders to fight the Russians away, so that they cannot come into South Africa. (01.03.2010)84

The reference to “our parents” and the defense of their war engagement marks a clear differentiation between we (white), and they (black), while the curriculum document proposes that the understanding of the past must be examined with greater insight and sensitivity,85 presumably implying that such stark “us” and “them” divisions are not what the curriculum writers had in mind. The manner in which the resistance movement (and hence the A.N.C.) is introduced as a liberator in the curriculum is entirely ignored, and the following statements of Teacher A leave us with
the impression that she intends to criticize the A.N.C. government in a generalizing way:

Teacher A: So, white people lived mostly in towns; they were responsible for the development of buildings, factories. They developed towns from scratch for better lives.

Learner: So where were the black people?

Teacher A: During that time there weren’t as many as there are now. At that time people took care that no one from Zimbabwe could come over, or from Botswana. That was regulated with passport laws. How it works in South Africa now […] You have seen that there is no border any more. If you feel your life in Zimbabwe is so bad, you can come over to South Africa, as they are going to provide a better life for you. So now you can move back and forth […] as you please. Without anyone being able to do anything. They said that all black people are welcome in South Africa, as Africa is now for all black people. (01.03.2010)

Again Teacher A applies a we-and-they dichotomy. In contrast, the curriculum speaks of a learning process “based on respect for democracy, equality, human dignity and social justice.” In this example, the teacher claims there were safe borders that maintained South Africa’s security. Now, every black person is welcome today, and South Africa is exclusively for Africans. She distances herself from the document’s intention to promote equality and articulates that there is no space for white people – who are said to have built up this state. The teacher’s critique might be legitimate, but it is in contrast to a facilitation-based teacher image because she does not allow learners to draw their own conclusions from a variety of historical sources. In an interview, the teacher is asked about South African societal and historical issues as represented in the curriculum:

Interviewer: And if you look at the current curriculum statement, it says a lot about reconciling the country and coming together, black and white […] kind of coming together?

Teacher A: We are never going to be together //mh// never ever. Because if something happens in the world, they will say, oh, but it’s our […] it’s apartheid’s fault. (04.03.2010)

The perspective of growing towards a united nation – as mentioned in the curriculum – is not supported by this teacher. A current South African affair, namely the history of apartheid, is rejected; and the risky and highly “complex process” of the curriculum’s adaption, including the young teacher’s personal conception, becomes obvious. Later in this period, Teacher A introduces the Group Areas Act as an important apartheid
law. She draws the picture of a black man’s ID document on the board and writes – with regard to the Group Areas Act – her name as employer on it. This would have been the usual procedure of the old days, when that man literally did not exist without the signature of his white employer, she explains, smiling. The learners, at the age of receiving their first ID documents or driver’s licenses, ask her about this. When asked, Teacher A again passes we-and-they, or now-and-back then-based judgments:

Learner: Miss, may I ask something, how long did you wait \textit{then} [during apartheid, HH] for your ID?
Teacher A: You know, back \textit{then} they had a system that worked, so it was really \textit{quick}.
Learner: Okay, because we wait \textit{so} long for such a little information, so we have to wait long
Teacher A: You, I have been waiting now for two \textit{months} for my new driver’s license, and all they had to do was to put a picture on it. And I have been waiting for two months!
Learner: But Miss, just think of how little information they need […]
Teacher A: The waiting time for ID is normally a month.
Learner: Miss, I have already waited \textit{one and a half} months
Teacher A: Yes, \textit{you see}! That is how it works in the \textbf{New} South Africa […] Back to our example. (01.03.2010)

By comparing the old system with the new, the “old” is associated with functionality, efficiency and an adequate pace, while the “new” is presented as in decline, slow and inefficient. The teacher’s perspective of disfunctionality might be understandable, but the curriculum’s aim is not considered. Division rather than unity and equality is emphasized by this teacher, and again she does not provide space for controversial debate, but gives her highly personal opinion.

Something similar happens in a second example, when Nelson Mandela and his role as resistance fighter are introduced in class. Teacher B asks the learners to open their books at a page showing a recent photograph of Mandela. One of the questions in the book, next to the picture, wants learners to analyze why Mandela is regarded as a hero. The teacher ignores the task, and simply asks the learners the name of the man, then closes his book and projects photographs of assassinations and sabotage during apartheid on the classroom wall. Burning houses, damaged bridges and destroyed streets are shown. Another picture shows the attack on the large South African refinery SASOL in 1980. The connection between the former president and assassinations only becomes clear when Teacher B explains: “This was the work of Umkhonto we Sizwe, the work of Mandela and the other boys.” (21.04.2010)

Umkhonto we Sizwe was the armed wing of the A.N.C., which was led for some time by Nelson Mandela, and is still a symbol of anti-state terror
for many whites, while today’s administration projects the armed struggle as generally just and as having broken down the apartheid government. In previous history periods at School B, the teacher explained the broader motivations for resistance against apartheid. Mandela as a person, however, appears exclusively in the context of a guerrilla fighter. He is presented extensively as an assassin which causes some shock for learners, who know Mandela from the media in a totally different way. The same positive picture is given in the textbook task, which follows the curriculum. Additionally, the use of the word boys (or jonge in Afrikaans) is remarkable as it was a common way for many white people to address black people in a childlike and inferior way. By using this term, the teacher reinstates an old-fashioned reference to Mandela as a terrorist and as a specifically black man, which is in dramatic contrast to the great respect for the former president that is common in South Africa today. Again, the teacher uses a totally teacher-centered methodological approach, and students accept his description and statements as blank truth. There is no indicator of an attempt to develop critical thinking that the curriculum speaks about: “They [the learners, HH] analyze sources and evidence, and study different interpretations, divergent opinions and voices. By doing so, they are taught to think in a rigorous and critical manner about society.”

One key incident of the apartheid resistance struggle is the Sharpeville massacre of 1960, which is set in a context with guerrilla war and assassination by Teacher B. While the famous picture of sixty Sharpeville victims’ coffins only remains projected on the wall for a second, a dramatic photograph of an assassination is projected onto the wall for a longer period of time, and the teacher provides space for the learners to express their emotions. An excerpt from my fieldwork notes illustrates these:

The next picture is put on (without much explanation of Sharpeville, if any), showing an act of sabotage with a demolished areal power line in a veld. When the picture is put on, I hear “Sjoe!,” “osh!” and “Agh nee [‘Oh no!’]!” A white girl in the first row shakes her head disapprovingly, and the white boy in the last window row looks even angrier than usual. The colored girl next to him seems just as shocked as he is. Teacher B explains the consequences “of terror” in terms of money, and sometimes even human lives. The girl in front of him puts her hand in front of her mouth – shocked? Teacher B finishes his explanation by openly stating “there you have your Mandela hero!” (23.04.2010)

In the context of teaching Sharpeville I asked Teacher A about her concept of Mandela as an historic figure in an interview:

Teacher A: The focus in history is always on how the black struggled. That’s the thing that will always go on […] They won’t say for instance, when Nelson Mandela […] planted bombs,
at Johannesburg station, they will say, there were bombs planted, but they won’t state how many whites were killed. And they will only say, when the ehm […] (silently) Sharpeville […] were busy there were sixty-nine killed, seventy-one were shot in the back and they would stipulate exactly how many died. But they won’t […] say the other stuff – how many white people died as well. (04.03.2010)

The explanations during conducted interviews reveal a personal involvement in the period dealt with and – to some extend – a perceptible humiliation as a white person. The usage of a we-and-they dichotomy indicates a strict separation, Teacher A even neglects hope for racial reconciliation. These views build a “hidden curriculum,” as both teachers do not hesitate to articulate their opinions in class, and represent personal experiences as part of the curricular contents. These personal experiences include judgments on the state as such.

Jackson discusses the standing of personal experiences, and asks if they should not be integral part of the curriculum. If so, the teachers’ statements would have a somewhat legitimate place, though any personal involvement need to be marked as such. The curriculum states that “historical enquiry […] supports the view that historical truth consists of a multiplicity of voices expressing varying and often contradictory versions of the same history,” and underlines the intention for multiperspective and empathetic engagement. The teachers’ we-and-they concept deprives learners of space for open and non-normative discourse and thus contests the curriculum’s general aim of equality and reconciliation. The role of Mandela in the curriculum is relativised by the teachers, and his heroic image is subject to a confrontational attack, leaving the impression of a terrorist. Sharpeville is relativised by the teacher as well – placed in the context of the “dark side” of the resistance, namely assassinations and killings by resistance fighters.

The curriculum document formulates the core question to be followed in this chapter as follows: “What was the nature of resistance to apartheid during these decades, and how was this resistance part of wider resistance in the world to human rights abuses?” The word “resistance” itself connotes a reaction instead of action as in a terrorist assassination. Following the curriculum’s logic there must have been an “action” which occurred first and provoked the reaction. While the term “nature of resistance” theoretically provides space to discuss the armed resistance in a controversial manner, the connection to “human rights” implies its legitimate character to a certain extent. “Resistance” is thus presented as an overall positive part of history, and no space for a multiperspective elaboration of “resistance” is provided. The global relevance of this resistance is mentioned and lauded. As shown, both teachers disagree with this noble con-
cept of resistance; instead, they represent the motivation for resistance as something entirely opposite, namely evil and non-legitimate.

Discussion

Benavot and Resh have demonstrated the tremendous impact of non-intended and somewhat autonomously directed learning practices in classrooms, which they named the “hidden curriculum.” They state that the chances of hidden curricula occurring on a greater scale are higher in societies with particularly diverse school systems, as is the case in South Africa. School administrators usually aim at uniformity in order to control and direct classroom contents more efficiently. Benavot and Resh defined factors for successful uniformity, namely a standardized curriculum, regular assessment of its implementation, a centralized system of school funding, uniform teacher-training programs and standardized achievement examinations. All these factors are recognized in South African policy, but the examples shown indicate that aspirations are not fulfilled everywhere yet. For example, “regular assessment of its implementation” indicates external and departmental control, including counselling for educators. Such classroom observations by school inspectors are rather seldomly conducted in South Africa, because teachers’ unions are very protective and influential.

Jackson defines “hidden curriculum” as a more or less open reservoir term that includes the focus on the difference between a curriculum’s aspiration and its reality. Some studies on “hidden curriculum” focus on deficiency and others on classroom contents that are used almost as an alternative to the valid curriculum. Jackson’s notion of schools as learning spheres in which not everything is regulated in curricula, and in which much happens besides curricula, may be differentiated on the basis of the above examples. In them, teachers clearly change the curricula, or at least stage their representation in an unintended way. Going further, Jackson’s differentiation between the “teaching” as conducted by teachers and the “experience” for students, must be disregarded here, as no assessment of effects on students can be made on the basis of the available data.

Both teachers ignore aspects of the curriculum and its methodological ideas. All observed periods were totally teacher-centered and did not apply any “new” ways of learning. Pedagogically, history becomes more or less anecdotal, and no broader historical conceptualization takes place. Both aspects, methodology and pedagogy, played important roles in the history curriculum reform. Their exclusive neglecting in the shown examples arouses the impression that there is a gap between curricular aspiration and classroom practice.
One of the key questions for this study asked whether curriculum reform was an appropriate way to change history teaching. No general answer can be given on the basis of the presented data. It shows, however, two things that seem worth considering when changing history education. First, it has often been argued that previously disadvantaged teachers who did not enjoy adequate training and who work in understaffed and under-resourced schools, would need post-1994 training and stricter controls in order to catch up with their historically more privileged colleagues. This racialised impression appears questionable. A curriculum reform, which is mostly planned in committees and ignores “the social and institutional forces impinging this [reform] process,” does not have the power to cause immediate and overall change. Instead, the cases of curriculum “re-balancing” or “hidden curricula” shown illustrate some problematic issues of the reform process and attest the powerful ways in which these teachers affirm their residual power in the classroom, given the marginalization of Afrikaner history discussed at the beginning. Their pedagogy almost seems to be a form of retaliation to this marginalization. These teachers, and presumably there are many others like them, do not act as the passive facilitators envisaged by O.B.E., nor do they appear to embrace the learner-centered approach of the new curriculum’s philosophy. Consequently, both teachers appear to make use of an apartheid pedagogy and methodology. As mentioned, departmental controls of teaching practices are rather uncommon in South Africa. Most control institutions originate in the school itself, from the same socio-ethnic background. Externally organized classroom evaluations would, however, be an effective tool to supervise the reform innovations on all educational levels.

Second, the amount of personal involvement of the teachers and a rather negative attitude towards the curriculum’s aims reveal the need for a further departmental guidance. In an interview, Senior Curriculum Planner Gail Weldon articulated the demand for workshops with history teachers that do not only focus on teaching quality, but include the aspect of biography. In these workshops, teachers are introduced to other ethnically and socially influenced perspectives. Weldon referred to successful workshops which are only available for a minority of history teachers. Such dialectic confrontations with one’s own experiences could open the teachers’ views to “how narratives exist in dialogic relationships with one another.” In the final evaluation of a workshop, an anonymous participant summarized his or her problem, and revealed the dilemma of history teaching: “I need to deal with issues at a personal level first before we attempt to breach the subject with our learners.”

As education for empathy and multiperspectivity starts with the teacher, a systematic and broad approach to teachers’ own biographies appears to be desirable. This would also minimize the risk of hidden cur-
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Curriculum elements, as teachers would then be able to identify more effectively with the document.
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Sofie Geschier, “‘South Africans did, Miss, we, we fought for our freedom’: Pedagogy and the potential of primary narratives in a history classroom,” *Education as Change* 14, no. 1 (2010): 56.


Sofie Geschier, “The Empathy Imperative: Primary Narratives in South African History Teaching” (PhD. Diss., University of Cape Town, 2008) and Geschier, “South Africans.”

Some newer monographs and journal contributions, several of which I cite here, are dealing with Afrikaner identity and changing patterns of self-esteem. The sometimes constructive and generalizing character of these works is understandable, as many authors are part of the ‘group’ they intend to characterize and give a biography. In this article, however, any discussion about these constructed identities will be neglected.


Visser, “Afrikaner Responses.”

Hermann Giliomee, “The Afrikaners: Biography of a People” (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003); also see Steyn, “Whiteness.”


the teachers’ sometimes “lost” situation throughout the wide country and across socioethnic boundaries.


26 Chisholm, “The History Curriculum;” Weldon, A Comparative Study.

27 Jansen, “Why OBE will Fail;” Interview with Rob Siebörger (Cape Town: University of Cape Town, 09.04.10).

28 Fataar, “Policy Networks,” 645.

29 Chisholm, “Introduction.”

30 Siebörger, “History and the Emerging Nation.”


32 Chisholm, “The History Curriculum.”

33 Cross et al., “From Policy to Practice,” 178.


36 Cross et al, “From Policy to Practice,” 185.

37 Jansen, “Rethinking Education Policy.”

38 Interview with Rob Siebörger (Cape Town: University of Cape Town, 09.04.10)

39 Cross et al, “From Policy to Practice,” 181; also see Jansen, “Rethinking Education Policy.”

40 Jansen, “Why OBE will Fail”; Jansen, “Rethinking Education Policy.”

41 Siebörger, “In the Beginning.”

42 Jansen, “Why OBE will Fail,” 147.


44 Siebörger, “History and the Emerging Nation;” see also Kros, “Effacing History.”

45 Kros, “Curriculum 2005”; see also Kros, “Effacing History.”

46 Fataar, “Policy Networks.”
37 Cross et al., “From Policy to Practice.”
38 Jansen, “Rethinking Education Policy” Siebörger, Interview.
39 Cross et al., “From Policy to Practice”; Siebörger, “History and the Emerging Nation.”
40 Fataar, “Policy Networks;” 650.
41 Cross et al., “From Policy to Practice;” 185.
42 Siebörger, “History and the Emerging Nation.”
43 Ibid.; also see Siebörger 2000; also see Jacqueline St Clair Dean, “Coping with Curriculum Change in South Africa,” International Journal of Historical Learning, Teaching and Research 1, no. 1 (2000).
44 van Eeden, “Impressions;” 100.
47 Jansen, “Image-ining Teachers.”
48 St Clair Dean, “Coping with Curriculum Change”; see also G. Cuthbertson and A Grundlingh, “Some Problematic Issues.”
50 Jansen, “Image-ining;” 122; see also Chisholm, “Introduction;”
51 Jansen, “Why OBE will Fail.”
52 van Eeden, “Impressions;” 132.
54 Jansen, “Image-ining;” 125.
55 Weldon, “Thinking;” 3.
57 DoE, National Curriculum, 5.
58 Ibid., 1..
59 Chisholm, “Introduction;”
60 Jansen, “Rethinking Education Policy;”
61 DoE, National Curriculum, 29.
62 Ibid., 31.
63 Interview with Cynthia Kros (Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand, 24.02.2010).
64 St Clair Dean, “Coping with Curriculum Change,” 3; see also Siebörger, “In the Beginning;”
66 Siebörger, “History and the Emerging Nation;”
67 DoE, National Curriculum, 24.
68 Ibid., 9; see also Siebörger, “History and the Emerging Nation;”
69 Wedekind and Harley, “Political Change;”
70 DoE, National Curriculum, 11.
71 Ibid., 5.
72 Kros, “Effacing History;” 1.
73 Giliomee, The Afrikaners.
74 All translations from Afrikaans to English are the author’s. Bold words indicate raised speech volume and underlined words indicate an emphasis in the voice of the speaker.
75 DoE, National Curriculum, 9.
76 Ibid., 5.
87 Jansen, “Image-ining Teachers.”
89 DoE, National Curriculum, 10.
91 Ibid., 9.
92 DoE, National Curriculum, 26.
93 Benavot & Resh, “The Social Construction”; also see Jackson, “Conceptions of Curricula.”