

# Towards a Brighter Future – Using South Africa’s Educational System as a Driving Force to Promote Change and Reconciliation

## Abstract

This paper, in its broadest sense, offers an overview of South Africa’s society from an educational point of view. It examines the South African educational system in its historical context and offers insights that can be helpful in the promotion of social equality and reconciliation. My thesis is that the current school system leaves possibilities unrealized and that it makes only little contribution to the country’s much-needed progress in tackling its most urgent problems, namely poverty, unemployment and inequality. The paper highlights certain aspects, such as the system’s development from the pre-1994 era until today, the overall performance of students and teachers, teacher education, curriculum change and planning, as well as the role of history as a school subject. This paper also includes a small survey conducted among future history teachers at the University of Cape Town. I will argue that above all history - not only as a school subject but also as a common good of society - can make a valuable contribution to the country’s sustainable development. I will conclude with a chapter that offers practical suggestions for the improvement of certain aspects of the educational system in order to promote change and reconciliation more efficiently.

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*Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.*

– Nelson Mandela –

## 1. Introduction

If one had to take stock of South Africa's current situation, inevitably one would face a very complex result. On the African continent South Africa stands out as the strongest economy and as a comparatively firm parliamentary democracy. Judging from immigration figures, South Africa offers a place of refuge for many on the search for a better life. The country is on the verge of becoming a global political player with increasing influence not only in the region, but also with its say in global matters. The successful hosting of the FIFA World Cup 2010 and the hosting of the 17<sup>th</sup> United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Durban this year have also played a part in establishing South Africa as a political power to be reckoned with. According to the 2011-2012 *Global Competitiveness Report*, South Africa ranked 50<sup>th</sup> out of 142 countries. Despite a slight decline over the last years, it is still the most competitive country on the African continent, competing in some sectors with the most developed countries in the world<sup>1</sup>. However, in crucial sectors such as government efficiency, health care, the employment sector and above all in the educational sector, South Africa has fallen below standards of developing countries. Seventeen years after the formal ending of apartheid, the development of the country has reached a crucial point and it needs special attention to improve poor performances in the sectors mentioned to make sure that *all* South Africans have a share in the development.

From a socio-historical point of view, the process of a society becoming a nation is still in the making. Unfortunately, the image of post-apartheid South Africa is still heavily freighted with the burden of race<sup>2</sup>. In Wally Morrow's words, "contemporary South Africa is not so much socially diverse as it is socially divided"<sup>3</sup>. Recent events have shown how fragile the framework is. The current storm surrounding the ANC Youth League leader Julius Malema is but one example that shows that democracy in South Africa is a rather delicate plant that needs special care and attention. Recently voted as one of Africa's 10 most powerful young men<sup>4</sup>, Malema is doing his fellow countrymen a disservice by driving a wedge between ethnic groups. In fact, there are a number of disturbing elements in present-day politics that indicate a deterioration of race-relations, which has not gone unnoticed by foreign media, including Germany's *Der Spiegel*<sup>5</sup> for instance. To condemn Malema's

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<sup>1</sup> The following sectors stand out as being very competitive: Financial market development, goods market efficiency, market size, Business sophistication and innovation, see: World Economic Forum. [www.weforum.org](http://www.weforum.org). "The Global Competitiveness Report 2011-2012". Accessed: 29.09.2011. <http://www.weforum.org/reports/global-competitiveness-report-2011-2012>. P. 323.

<sup>2</sup> Bundy, Collin. *New Nation, New History? Constructing the Past in Post-Apartheid South Africa*. IN: Stolten, Hans Erik (Ed.). *History Making and Present Day Politics: The Meaning of Collective Memory in South Africa*. Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2007. P. 79.

<sup>3</sup> Morrow, Wally. *Learning to Teach in South Africa*. Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2007. P. 167.

<sup>4</sup> Independent Online. [www.iol.co.za](http://www.iol.co.za). "Juju among Africa's powerful young – Forbes". Accessed: 15.09.2011. <http://www.iol.co.za/news/politics/juju-among-africa-s-powerful-young-forbes-1.1138202>.

<sup>5</sup> For instance, see: Spiegel Online. <http://www.spiegel.de>. "Südafrikas Nachwuchspolitiker Malema – Experte für Rassenhass". Accessed: 27.09.2011.

inflammatory rhetoric and racial slurs is one thing, to understand why he has so many supporters and to take effective measures against a 're-racialisation' of society is yet another.

Not only the F W de Klerk Foundation is concerned about recent developments where racial issues are brought back to the political agenda, so should be every member of society with an interest in peaceful social relations. By promoting positive relationships in a multicultural society and by working for mutual understanding and respect through communication, the Foundation addresses the decline of socio-cultural relationships among South Africans. The most powerful 'weapon' in this endeavour is the promotion and upholding of the rights, values and principles of the South African Constitution that is at everybody's disposal. Above all the principle of non-racialism and the foundational rights to equality and human dignity are at stake in the current climate. In order to prevent a further emotional charge, the roots of the problem(s) have to be tackled. In the following, the paper argues that the right to quality education, enshrined in the Constitution (chapter 2, section 29), has to play a more vital role in overcoming the country's most urgent problems.

"Although education cannot transform the world, the world cannot be transformed without education"<sup>6</sup>. The all important role of education is undisputed; nevertheless, much remains to be done in order to exploit the system's full potential. Education and the role it has to play in and for society is plain sailing: Education is deeply embedded in society. It reflects a country's values, structures, hopes and fears. Education carries the aspirations of a nation to bring about change and sustainable development. Without a doubt education provides the base that enables an economy and a society to function and grow, it allows the individual access to empowerment. It also provides social orientation that ensures peace and stability<sup>7</sup>. Knowledge through education and power have to be seen as two sides of one and the same coin<sup>8</sup>. In other words, education has to be seen as the beating heart of a society striving for equality, empowerment, economic growth and peace. Without situating education in that central position, the overall development cannot be sustainable and South Africa runs the risk of losing the momentum to address its most urgent problems namely economic and social inequality. It goes without saying that the unequal distribution of wealth is "a fairly straightforward outcome of colonial and apartheid engineering"<sup>9</sup>. Although the gap of personal disposable income has closed significantly in favour of historically disadvantaged people, South Africa is still a long way from providing equal opportunities to all citizens. Therefore, bearing the historical origins of current problems in mind, history, not only as a school subject, but also as a common good of society, holds valuable lessons and can make an important contribution to the country's sustainable development.

This paper will provide a concise summary of South Africa's status quo involving economic, political, and social issues. Chapter 3 will examine the role of history during apartheid, during the struggle against apartheid and the role it plays currently in society and in schools. The paper will focus then on the educational system of the pre-1994 and the post-1994 era and describe major changes and

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<sup>6</sup> Bill Nasson quoted in: Chisholm, Linda. *Introduction*. IN: Chisholm, Linda. Changing Class – Education and Social Change in Post-Apartheid South Africa. Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2004. P. 13.

<sup>7</sup> Bloch, Graeme. *The Complexity of System Change in Education*. IN: Maile, Simeon (Ed.). Education and Poverty Reduction Strategies – Issues of Policy Coherence. Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2008. P. 126f.

<sup>8</sup> Morrow, Wally. Learning to Teach in South Africa. P. 30.

<sup>9</sup> Aliber, Michael. Poverty-Eradication and Sustainable Development. Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2008. P. 2.

developments in the educational and curriculum policy. The role of teacher education will also be highlighted as this part of the educational system may well hold the highest potential for improvement. Chapter 5 will evaluate the data gathered from a future teacher survey held at the School of Education at the University of Cape Town. Chapter 6 provides a short summary of the findings. Chapter 7 concludes with suggestions concerning the development and improvement of the educational system. As a foreigner in South Africa, my views in this paper are inevitably those of an outsider. This is clearly a limiting factor when it comes to inside knowledge; on the other hand, it is sometimes easier and maybe even more effective to see things as a third-party.

## **2. The current state of affairs: political, economical and social issues**

"Peace does not fare well where poverty and deprivation reign. It does not flourish where there is ignorance and a lack of education and information. Repression, injustice and exploitation are inimical with peace. Peace is gravely threatened by inter-group fear and envy and by the unleashing of unrealistic expectations. Racial, class and religious intolerance and prejudice are its mortal enemies."

- F. W. De Klerk -

As already mentioned in the introductory paragraph, there are a number of disturbing elements on a political level that support the conclusion that inter-community relations are changing for the worse. Most notably, in a recent document published by the US-based organisation *Genocide Watch* South Africa has been upgraded from stage 5 "Polarisation" to stage 6 "Preparation"<sup>10</sup>. The organisation justifies its decision with the political rise of ANC Youth League leader Julius Malema who has considerable support among young black South Africans and despite widespread criticism for singing the old anti-apartheid song "Kill the Boer", he remains in a position of growing power. It is hard to say what is more frightening: the fact that violence against a population group is being planned and incited in public or the inability and/or unwillingness of the leadership of the ANC to discipline and remove Malema? The fact is, current debates around the disgraceful role of the ANC Youth League leader not only fuel racial tensions in the country, but also blatantly show government's inefficiency to deal with this matter.

In a recent interview with *Business Day*, Deputy President Kgalema Motlanthe got to the heart of one of South Africa's biggest problems: "[W]e have close to 2, 8-million young people between ages of 18 and 24 who are unemployed and not in any institution of learning. This statistic represents the ticking time bomb that threatens to inflame pent-up emotions within the youth if not urgently addressed"<sup>11</sup>. This view is shared by Reynold Sonn who claims that "large groups of youths have no

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<sup>10</sup> Genocide Watch - Coordinator of the International Alliance to End Genocide. [www.genocidewatch.org](http://www.genocidewatch.org). "South Africa". Accessed: 29.09.2011. <http://www.genocidewatch.org/southafrica.html>.

<sup>11</sup> Business Day. [www.businessday.co.za](http://www.businessday.co.za). "Jobless youth a ticking bomb, says Motlanthe". Accessed: 20.09.2011. <http://www.businessday.co.za/articles/Content.aspx?id=151862>.

family tradition, no religious frameworks, no ethical values, little education, and no work experience”<sup>12</sup>. Professor Lawrence Schlemmer shares a similar view in his latest article<sup>13</sup>. According to Schlemmer, most of the affected youth will never find a sustainable economic activity to become self-reliant and productive citizens<sup>14</sup>. Unfortunately, the high rate of (youth) unemployment is not the only problem the country is facing. Closely related to unemployment is poverty, another major factor of instability. Poverty is a very subjective experience and can be seen as a multiple deprivation of employment, health, housing, education, skills and training. Therefore, poverty also requires a multi-agency response<sup>15</sup> in which education has to play an important role.

Unemployment and poverty still have a strong racial and geographical dimension<sup>16</sup>, which leaves us with the problem of economic inequality. According to latest figures of the World Bank, South Africa is a country where income and wealth are distributed very unequally. Despite government’s attempts to tackle poverty through various programmes and initiatives<sup>17</sup>, not everything has worked out the way it had been planned, leaving many formerly disadvantaged people without improvement above all in rural and fairly underdeveloped areas. Although a robust economical growth in the post-apartheid era has led to a measurable decline of income poverty, inequality has increased in the period of 1995 to 2008<sup>18</sup>. “The political miracle of 1994 has simply not been followed by an economic miracle”<sup>19</sup>; at least not to an extent where *all* South Africans could have a share in the benefits.

Another factor that has a negative influence on the country’s development is the poor performance of the health sector. According to the latest figures of the *Global Competitiveness Index*, South Africa ranks on place 138 when it comes to the prevention of HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria and on place 127 with regard to life expectancy out of a total of 142 countries<sup>20</sup>. With about 12 % of the total population suffering from HIV/AIDS, South Africa has the largest number of infected people in the world. Besides the human tragedy that goes along with every single infection, the economic

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<sup>12</sup> Sonn, Reynold. *Poverty, Unemployment and Education: Strategies to Address the Disservice of Modern Development*. IN: Maile, Simeon (Ed.). *Education and Poverty Reduction Strategies – Issues of Policy Coherence*. Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2008. P. 191.

<sup>13</sup> Schlemmer, Lawrence. “How stable is South Africa?” The article is accessible on the homepage of the F W de Klerk Foundation. [www.fwdeklerk.org](http://www.fwdeklerk.org). Accessed: 29.09.2011.

[http://www.fwdeklerk.org/cause\\_data/images/2137/110801\\_How\\_stable\\_is\\_South\\_Africa.pdf](http://www.fwdeklerk.org/cause_data/images/2137/110801_How_stable_is_South_Africa.pdf).

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. P. 2.

<sup>15</sup> Maile, Simeon. *Education and Poverty: Development Policy Options in a Democratic Era*. IN: Maile, Simeon (Ed.). *Education and Poverty Reduction Strategies – Issues of Policy Coherence*. Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2008. P. 159.

<sup>16</sup> Aliber, Michael. *Poverty-Eradication and Sustainable Development*. P. 2.

<sup>17</sup> Among others: the *Rural Development Programme* (RDP) of 1994 with focus on providing access to water, jobs, land, education and health care and the *Growth, Employment and Redistribution* strategy (GEAR) of 1996 that on the one hand helped greatly improving South Africa’s fiscal health but on the other hand largely failed to deliver in key areas such as employment and redistribution.

<sup>18</sup> The Gini coefficient rose from 0.64 to 0.67 in the timeframe mentioned, see: The World Bank.

[www.worldbank.org](http://www.worldbank.org). Accessed: 28.09.2011.

<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/AFRICAEXT/SOUTHAFRICAEXTN/0,,menuPK:368086~pagePK:141132~piPK:141107~theSitePK:368057,00.html>.

<sup>19</sup> Sonn, Reynold. *Poverty, Unemployment and Education*. P. 182.

<sup>20</sup> “The Global Competitiveness Report 2011-2012”.

<http://www.weforum.org/reports/global-competitiveness-report-2011-2012>. P. 323.

damage of the disease can only be estimated. A thorough study would have to include all factors involved: health care costs, medication, child care, absenteeism, reduced productivity and increased labour turnover. In short, the AIDS pandemic is an unprecedented human tragedy leaving children without parents and depriving parents of their children. Furthermore, it also acts as a major speed bump to the country's development from an economic point of view.

Brain-drain is another issue, with which South Africa has to come to terms. Being among the nations that has been hardest hit by human capital flight, about 100.000 skilled workers have left South Africa over the past three years<sup>21</sup>. An estimated 800.000 South Africans have left since 1994. Along with their crucial skills goes their accumulated capital and, adding to the bill, emigrants usually take the fraction of value of their training sponsored by the government or other organizations with them. Furthermore, "an additional 70% of skilled South Africans are saying that they are considering leaving the nation"<sup>22</sup>. To top it off, with each skilled professional that leaves the country, the industry loses ten unskilled jobs. In order to break the cycle of losing skilled professionals without replenishment, the answer to that must be two-fold: the government has to put more effort into the educational system to produce more skilled labourers and improve upon the push factors such as lack of opportunities, political instability, economic depression, health risks and a high crime rate.

South Africa's diversity is also evident in the people's perception of apartheid's legacy. In 2004, James Gibson published a thorough study on how South Africans perceive the past and the present differently<sup>23</sup>. Gibson concludes that there is still an enduring legacy of apartheid. Despite the slogan 'let's forget about the past and embrace the future', the legacy of apartheid is still manifest in the salience of group politics<sup>24</sup>. Although the study shows that most South Africans take pride in being South African, they also seem to be able to hold multiple identities. In other words, most South Africans still consider themselves as belonging to a certain racial group. About 50% claim "South African" identity as a primary or secondary identity, whereas the reverse side prefers the label of a specific racial group<sup>25</sup>. This, in turn, raises the question of how racial group identity influences the state of democratization in South Africa. Following Gibson, there is a two-fold answer to that question: on the one hand, racial group identity clearly undermines "the formation of multi-group, interest-based coalition, which is essential to democracy, [on the other hand,] democracies thrive on conflict; they are at their best when citizens and groups disagree with one another, when pluralism prevails"<sup>26</sup>.

Questions now would be: How to make sure that the existing resources are distributed more equally; how to fight corruption and government inefficiency; how to deal with the ticking time bomb of jobless youth; how to prevent future generations of growing up in poverty and

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<sup>21</sup> Online Universities. <http://www.onlineuniversities.com>. "10 Countries Facing the Biggest Brain Drain". Accessed: 27.09.2011.

<http://www.onlineuniversities.com/blog/2011/07/10-countries-facing-the-biggest-brain-drain/>.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<http://www.onlineuniversities.com/blog/2011/07/10-countries-facing-the-biggest-brain-drain/>.

<sup>23</sup> Gibson, James L. Overcoming Apartheid – Can Truth Reconcile a Divided Nation? Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2004.

<sup>24</sup> Gibson, James L. Overcoming Apartheid. P. 67.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. P. 54.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. P. 345.

unemployment, how to tackle the spread of HIV/AIDS and how to stop current brain drain? The first questions inevitably have to be dealt with on a political level and will not be addressed in this paper. However, empowering and educating future generations about the country's past, providing educational work in the field of HIV/AIDS and strengthening the national sense of identity and social cohesion clearly demand the intervention of the educational sector. It is widely held that quality education is not only the single most effective weapon to combat HIV/AIDS, but also important in reducing poverty and inequality<sup>27</sup>. Education should also play a more prominent role in overcoming inter-group fear and in promoting democratic values that will help stabilize democracy in South Africa.

### 3. The role of history, history teaching and reconciliation

“It is unthinkable that we should deny history its proper place in a country where history has consciously been used to teach myths about white superiority and black inferiority, where history has reinforced racial myths and stereotypes – myths and stereotypes that still flourish in our schools as much as in wider society – where multiple kinds of interaction between black, brown and white have taken root which confound racism and racists and where there is a long and remarkable history of struggle and resistance. It is unthinkable. Studying history in a creative manner through critical interrogation of different interpretations and sources is not incompatible with having a non-negotiable content”<sup>28</sup>.

- Kader Asmal -

Besides political and economic problems, the country's development is stunted by social issues that are derived from the past. More precisely, the past itself and the question of how to come to terms with it seems to be a problem that only very few South Africans are willing to address at the moment. This is evident in the serious decline of the study of history in South Africa since 1994<sup>29</sup>. While all South Africans agree that the past holds valuable lessons, there is no general agreement on how to deal with the past. How should there be an all-round solution to that question as so many South Africans have perceived the past differently? The process of coming to terms with the past cannot be put on hold. The door to the past has to remain open, even more so in the light of current economic and social inequalities which are partly inherited from the pre-1994 era. In the context of South Africa, accounting for the past also has to involve a certain level of reconciliation. Despite the ambitious attempt of the South African *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* to establish a

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<sup>27</sup> Maile, Simeon. *Education and Poverty*. P. 159.

<sup>28</sup> Speech by the former Minister of Education, Professor Kader Asmal, on the occasion of the launch of the process to Streamline and Strengthen Curriculum 2005, Centurion, Tshwane, 30 January 2001, quoted in: Copley, Alan. *Does Social History Have a Future? The Ending of Apartheid and Recent Trends in South African Historiography*. IN: *Journal of Southern African Studies*. Vol. 27, No. 3, 2001. P. 625.

<sup>29</sup> Stolten, Hans Erik. *History in the New South Africa: An Introduction*. IN: Stolten, Hans Erik (Ed.). *History Making and Present Day Politics: The Meaning of Collective Memory in South Africa*. Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2007. P. 6.

commonly accepted view on the past, the way memories are constructed within individuals and communities contradicts such a universal approach. The lesson to be learnt is to accept that there is no single narrative of the past. Quite the contrary, each individual constructs his or her own view of the past in a constructivist and very 'personal' way. Crucial to a person's historical understanding and perception are personal experiences and personal living conditions. It is constrained by social, cultural, physical, and psychological factors. The individual memory of the past is a product of active knowledge construction which, inevitably, leads to different results. The human brain is not a tank that is able to store an infinite amount of information; it is rather a storeroom with limited space where a high degree of capacity utilization is achieved through a well-regulated act of processing, storing, and forgetting information. Bearing that in mind, the process of coming to terms with the past is not an easy task. However, even the mere attempt to account for the past will yield valuable results. The following paragraphs will shed light on the two-fold role history has played during apartheid and on the role it should play in the present. I will argue that without a thorough process of coming to terms with the past, true reconciliation cannot take place. To put it more dramatically, without interracial reconciliation, South Africa will hardly be able to survive as a multicultural society<sup>30</sup>.

### 3.1. The role of history

"Knowledge of history helps to shape qualities of imagination, sensitivity, balance, accuracy and discriminating judgement and provides multiple perspectives on how various elements have come together to create a society or to build a nation"<sup>31</sup>. This very knowledge of history enables us to evaluate our current position in relation to what had been before and what is likely to follow in the future. Admittedly, the role history has played during apartheid is very controversial: On the one hand especially academic history and historiography has done much to foster and to justify racial segregation in South Africa simply by teaching and writing history based on a European understanding of organisation, law, democracy, progress and religion. On the other hand, "history was the master tool of intellectual resistance to apartheid"<sup>32</sup> in the 1970s and 1980s. Given the controversial, yet crucial role history has played, the decline of history deserves special attention. Since 1994, academic history has seen a steady decline in academic publications, in the number of history students, in government funding, and even worse, in authority and prestige. Christopher Saunders holds that the transfer of power in 1994 was not matched by any significant change in historiography and that historians were not involved in the nation-building process as it was the case for instance in tropical Africa in the 1960s<sup>33</sup>. Up to the very day, history as an academic subject is facing a multi-causal problem: it is not seen as 'useful' and does not lead to obvious employment in economically tough times. Furthermore, history is seen as a source of discomfort and

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<sup>30</sup> Gibson, James L. Overcoming Apartheid. P. 117.

<sup>31</sup> Stolten, Hans Erik. *History in the New South Africa*. P. 6.

<sup>32</sup> Bundy, Collin. *New Nation, New History?* P. 73.

<sup>33</sup> Saunders, Christopher. *Four Decades of South African Academic Historical Writing: A Personal Perspective*. IN: Stolten, Hans Erik (Ed.). History Making and Present Day Politics: The Meaning of Collective Memory in South Africa. Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2007. P. 286.

embarrassment<sup>34</sup>. This state of disenchantment with history does not come as a surprise. Similar developments can be found in other countries where gross human rights violations took place. It has to be clear that remembering the past might not be easy, at times even painful and discomforting; however, forgetting the past may well be impossible.

### 3.2. History teaching and reconciliation

As I have mentioned in the introductory paragraph of this chapter, reconciliation will have to be part of a thorough process of coming to terms with the past in South Africa. By definition, reconciliation is a dynamic process where both sides have to be ready to engage in reconciliation and it is not an end-point in itself. It is a process involving communication, apology and forgiveness, justice and individual healing in order for a society to recover the ability to function normally and effectively after a period of violence<sup>35</sup>. In order not to end up as an empty word, reconciliation has to comprise society as a whole. Historically, schooling has played an important role in building nations and in promoting reconciliation<sup>36</sup>. It is vital to recognize the role of history as a school subject in the process of social and civic reconstruction.

At present, the South African educational system does not cater for reconciliatory measures. History teaching basically ends with the election of 1994 and leaves aspects of the post-apartheid era aside. However, as the assessment of the case study in chapter 5 will show, future history teachers see the necessity to include aspects such as the adoption of the Constitution and the work of the South African *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* (TRC). Furthermore, it was commonly held that the educational system needs to prevent further increase of racial tensions. A preventive measure would be a solid historical education that clearly illustrates the interrelation of the past, present and future. It had to take South Africa's heterogeneous society into account and beware of a so-called 'master narrative'. It would have to shed critical light on the works and the findings of the TRC by pointing out its narrow mandate and its one-sided approach to the history of apartheid. Certainly, despite its shortcomings, the work of the TRC had a positive influence on South Africa's post-apartheid development: It had captured the attention of a large part of the population and had successfully established the widely accepted view that atrocities occurred on both sides during the struggle. As such, the TRC provided at least a basis for dialogue. However, the work and findings of the TRC are but a starting point for society to get involved in the process of reconciliation. Due to South Africa's young population, the chief role in this process will have to be played by people who never really experienced apartheid at first hand. It is up to the educational system and especially to the profession of history teaching to equip the new generations with a thorough understanding of the past. The key prerequisite of reconciliation is the promotion of mutual understanding and respect in order to reach the state where people are judged as individuals and not labelled with group stereotypes<sup>37</sup>. In this context it is also crucial to grant history its proper place in society in

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<sup>34</sup> Bundy, Collin. *New Nation, New History?* P. 75.

<sup>35</sup> Cole, Elizabeth A. *Introduction: Reconciliation and History Teaching*. IN: Cole, Elizabeth A. (Ed.). Teaching the Violent Past – History Education and Reconciliation. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007. P. 1.

<sup>36</sup> Chapman, Audrey R. *Afterword*. IN: Cole, Elizabeth A. (Ed.). Teaching the Violent Past – History Education and Reconciliation. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007. P. 319.

<sup>37</sup> Gibson, James L. Overcoming Apartheid. P. 118.

order to prevent future generations from running blindly into an uncertain future without knowing where they are coming from.

#### 4. Education in South Africa – past and present

Education certainly is not a universal remedy, but it can be a universal weapon if applied correctly. The educational struggle in South Africa, in order to be successful, will have to be a professional and not a political struggle<sup>38</sup>. That does not mean that politicians should not have a say in this matter, but the issue is simply too important to be a political matter only. It goes without saying that educational policy will have to be put into practice by the democratically elected government and the existing administrative structures. However, the development of such a policy has to be conducted by the smartest brains offered by academia, schools, the departments and the ministry of education. It cannot fall victim to narrow-minded party politics. The following paragraphs will outline several aspects of the educational system: a description of the pre-1994 educational system, major changes and challenges since 1994, fairly recent changes in the educational and curriculum policy and the current state of affairs. It is not a secret that any educational system can only be as good as its teachers. The low level of education and the apparent shortage of critical skills among the population inevitably shift the focus on the poor quality of the schooling system<sup>39</sup>, which in turn leaves the question of the quality of teacher performance and hence teacher education. Besides a number of important factors, qualifications and skills of teachers have a huge impact on the quality of learning and teaching<sup>40</sup>. Special attention will be given to the crucial field of teacher education and training.

##### 4.1. The educational system during apartheid

It is imperative to know the roots of a problem in order to take purposeful action in the present. Apartheid society was a classic case of social engineering characterised by asymmetrical structures of power<sup>41</sup>. Asymmetries did not spare the educational system, quite the contrary, schooling policy was a major pillar of apartheid. In other words, state education policy went hand in hand with economical and political control of the African population<sup>42</sup>. Along with the *Population Registration Act* of 1950, the educational system of the early days of apartheid provided the basis for the strict separation of the four racial groups. Influenced by the report of the *Eiselen Commission* (1949-1951), a new educational system was introduced in the 1950s and 1960s. The *Bantu Education Act* of 1953, the *Coloured Persons Education Act* of 1963 and the *Indian Education Act* of 1964 provided for the

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<sup>38</sup> Morrow, Wally. Learning to Teach in South Africa. P. 28.

<sup>39</sup> Kruss, Glenda. *Introduction*. IN: Kruss, Glenda (Ed.). Opportunities and Challenges for Teacher Education Curriculum in South Africa. Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2009. P. 1.

<sup>40</sup> Carter, Jonathan. *Education in South Africa: Some Points for Policy Coherence*. IN: Maile, Simeon (Ed.). Education and Poverty Reduction Strategies – Issues of Policy Coherence. Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2008. P. 27.

<sup>41</sup> Morrow, Wally. Learning to Teach in South Africa. P. 137.

<sup>42</sup> Badat, Saleem M. Black Student Politics, Higher Education and Apartheid – From SASO to SANSCO, 1968-1990. Pretoria: HSRC Press, 1999. P. 50.

strict separation of the four 'population groups' on an educational level<sup>43</sup>. Without going into greater details, it can be said that the acts mentioned not only consolidated but also reinforced segregating measures. Starting at primary education, there was an impermeable system of separate schools for the four 'population groups' and the aims of education for each group should be 'realistic' in terms of the students' social and economic realities. "[It is] maintained that all education to be efficient should be expressed in terms of the needs of a particular people, situated in a particular environment, at a particular stage in their development"<sup>44</sup>. Basically, there is nothing wrong with tailor-made education; in fact, optimal support for every student would be very close to the ideal state of affairs. However, nobody can deny that this form of tailor-made education was degrading and inhumane. Thus, it comes hardly as a surprise that the four schooling systems have shown considerable differences in terms of overall quality of teaching and learning (teacher training and qualification, class size, funding, facilities, equipment, learning material, etc.): "'White' schools [were] far better off than any of the others, and 'Indian' and 'Coloured' schools [were] better off than those for 'Africans'. [Furthermore], schooling [was] compulsory for 'Whites', 'Indians' and 'Coloureds' but not for 'Africans'"<sup>45</sup>.

Not only was primary and secondary education affected by racial segregation, but also tertiary education. 'Non-white' higher education has been characterised by limited funding and inadequate provision of facilities "to ensure that higher education was essentially restricted to certain sections of the white dominant classes"<sup>46</sup>. Accordingly in the 1960s and 1970s, the few black students enrolled in universities (about 10% of the total number of students) mainly studied in the sectors of Humanities and Education and were severely under-represented in the scientific and technical fields<sup>47</sup>. Bearing that in mind, it does not come as a surprise that even today, about 50 years after the formal establishment of such a discriminating educational policy, there is a critical shortage of skilled labour in these fields. One cannot ignore that a 'culture of learning' has to be consolidated over years if not decades. An awareness of the correlation of education and empowerment has to be passed on from generation to generation. Ideally, children learn from their parents about the importance of learning. Therefore, there is no point in criticizing the younger generation(s) of formerly disadvantaged South Africans for not providing the numbers of workers the industries need. It is also pointless to blame parents of historically disadvantaged families as most of them were never given the chance to get a decent education. It might not be the most optimistic vision of the future, but the internalisation of the importance of systematic learning has been neglected in the educational system over years<sup>48</sup>, therefore establishing such a mindset will simply take time and, of course, it will have to be actively promoted on behalf of the teaching profession.

Another important aspect of pre-1994 education was the consolidation and restructuring of the whole educational system. It has been a huge challenge in the post-apartheid era to restructure eighteen formerly racially-fragmented education departments into nine non-racial departments

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<sup>43</sup> Morrow, Wally. *Learning to Teach in South Africa*. P. 139.

<sup>44</sup> Excerpt of the report of the *Eiselen Commission*, quoted in: *Ibid.* P. 139.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* P. 140.

<sup>46</sup> Badat, Saleem M. *Black Student Politics, Higher Education and Apartheid*. P. 48.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.* P. 52.

<sup>48</sup> Morrow, Wally. *Learning to Teach in South Africa*. P. 31f.

under the governance of one Ministry of Education<sup>49</sup>. Major changes in the post-apartheid era and the current state of affairs have to be seen against this background of a formerly racially fragmented educational system having left the vast majority of South Africans deprived of equal opportunities at a very early stage of their development. Sixteen years after the introduction of an explicitly non-racial constitution, it should not be about accusations and finger-pointing. It is about time to come up with a holistic approach to provide quality education for everyone, especially for children of formally disadvantaged people not in order to close the door on the past, but to close the current gap between the different racial groups in South Africa.

#### 4.2. Post-apartheid education

Since 1994, the education landscape in South Africa has undergone significant changes. The whole organisational and administrative sector has been decentralised. New forms of assessment, qualification and certification have been introduced. Teacher education has been transferred from college base to the sector of higher education, curricula have been changed and rewritten and most importantly, all educational institutions have been opened to people of all races<sup>50</sup>. At the same time, however, post-apartheid education policy has had some unintended effects: Although formerly white, Indian or Coloured schools are now open to everyone, only very few African children have been integrated<sup>51</sup>. Teachers' training colleges were shut down and transferred to higher education in order to raise the professional status of the teaching profession, but simultaneously universities became more selective and competitive which resulted in a critical shortage of teachers. The political transformation has been paralleled by a transformation of the educational system. Yet, one has to be critical about the overall performance of the system. With today's knowledge that much is left to be desired, major changes in the educational system since 1994 can be seen in a different and more critical light.

According to section 29 of the Bill of Rights of the South African Constitution, "everyone has the right to a basic education, which the state must make progressively available and accessible"<sup>52</sup>. Education was transformed into a constitutional right and was formally put into practice through the implementation of the central pieces of legislation – the *National Education Policy Act* of 1996 and the *South African Schools Act* of 1996. Leaving content aside, the core pieces of legislation focused on institutional form, governing and on funding alone, not on schooling per se. According to the report of the SASA Review Task Team of 2006, the *South African Schools Act* has been taken to court on a regular basis since its implementation in 1996. Regular amendments to the act, as well as the slow and inefficient implementation of the act have to be seen as limiting factors in the transformation of the South African educational system. Furthermore, the *South African Schools Act* exclusively dealt with public schools and left independent schools untouched. I am not arguing for a complete fusion of public and independent schools. Independent schools have always been centres

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<sup>49</sup> Chisholm, Linda. *Introduction*. P. 1.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.* P. 1.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.* P. 6.

<sup>52</sup> See: South African Government Online. [www.gov.za](http://www.gov.za). "The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa".

Accessed: 10.10.2011.

<http://www.info.gov.za/documents/constitution/1996/index.htm>.

for pedagogical innovations that have also improved learning in public schools. However, the qualitative gap between public and independent schools has to be narrowed to the benefit of public schools in order to prevent the establishment of two different schooling systems that would inevitably be inefficient and costly. A possible solution is close at hand: A comprehensive single education act involving both public and independent schools would be the preferred legal framework. The new act would have to allow for a quick and unproblematic implementation where responsibilities and competencies are clearly defined among the Ministry of Education, the provincial departments, district offices, principals and School Governing Bodies.

Apart from the legislative framework and the administrative structure, the content of learning needed to be addressed by the new government. The first attempt to do so was in the form of Curriculum 2005 (C2005). The 'master plan' was launched in 1997 and had three basic design features: Firstly, it was outcomes-based; secondly, school subjects were replaced by 'learning areas', and thirdly, a learner-centred pedagogy was promoted<sup>53</sup>. Little positive is found in research literature on this first attempt of curriculum change. Some say that the new curriculum was more concerned with method than with content<sup>54</sup>; others hold that C2005 was a political and not a pedagogical project<sup>55</sup> and that it was more concerned with symbolism than with changing practice<sup>56</sup>. Widely criticised was also the degradation of history as a school subject. In the context of "forget about the past and embrace the future"<sup>57</sup>, history was not seen as appropriate and useful anymore, although its role as a "master tool of intellectual resistance to apartheid"<sup>58</sup> was widely unchallenged. All the more surprising came the decision of the Ministry of Education not to teach students about the conflicting, yet crucial role of history during apartheid. However, as it has already been elaborated in the previous chapter, the 'obsession' with the future after a period of severe crisis and transformation is not unparalleled in history.

Other shortcomings of C2005 are found in the area of planning, teacher training and implementation. It is neither an accusation, nor an excuse, it is a mere fact based on the findings in retrospect that the educational system at that time did not have the capacity required to shoulder such a project. "Given the very short time between finalisation of the curriculum and its implementation, the national Department of Education (DoE) and its various provincial counterparts had no choice but to provide crash-course training for teachers"<sup>59</sup>. It is also quite telling that the Department did not have the means to provide for the training, but instead had to sub-contract a range of consultants and NGOs<sup>60</sup>. Given the historical disadvantage of the majority of people involved in the educational sector, it did not come as a surprise that only very few schools adjusted

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<sup>53</sup> Wedekind, Volker, and Ken Harley. *Political Change, Curriculum Change and Social Formation, 1990 to 2002*. IN: Chisholm, Linda (Ed.). *Changing Class – Education and Social Change in Post-Apartheid South Africa*. Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2004. P. 197.

<sup>54</sup> Legassick, Martin. *Reflections on Practising Applied History in South Africa, 1994-2002: From Skeletons to Schools*. IN: Stolten, Hans Erik (Ed.). *History Making and Present Day Politics: The Meaning of Collective Memory in South Africa*. Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2007. P. 142.

<sup>55</sup> Wedekind, Volker, and Ken Harley. *Political Change, Curriculum Change and Social Formation*. P. 198.

<sup>56</sup> Carter, Jonathan. *Education in South Africa*. P. 22.

<sup>57</sup> Badat, Saleem M. *Black Student Politics, Higher Education and Apartheid*. P. 2.

<sup>58</sup> Bundy, Collin. *New Nation, New History?* P. 73.

<sup>59</sup> Wedekind, Volker, and Ken Harley. *Political Change, Curriculum Change and Social Formation*. P. 200.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.* P. 200.

effectively to becoming places of learning. Ironically, the design of C2005 mainly worked in the ex-Model C schools. Therefore, any study on C2005 can only deliver a damning indictment of widening instead of closing the gap between historically advantaged and disadvantaged schools<sup>61</sup>.

The current state of affairs of the South African educational system has to be seen against the background of huge challenges inherited from the past, which are not so much an excuse but an explanation and a signpost to where to pay special attention in the future. The situation described by the *Global Competitiveness Index* speaks a clear language: the quality of the primary and secondary education system competes with developing countries and is far from being well on the way<sup>62</sup>. Reading skills and the performance in maths and science need to be improved dramatically. At present, there are about 12 million students enrolled in public schools and 350.000 students in independent schools. The average ratio of students to teachers in public schools is 31.5 to one, whereas a teacher in independent schools takes care of only 17.5 students on average<sup>63</sup>. The alarming disparity between public and independent schools becomes apparent not only in class sizes, but above all in matric pass rates: 98% of the private school students pass matric, while only half of the students pass matric in public schools. In other words, those who can afford sending their kids to independent schools will provide them with a clear head start in life, the absolute majority who cannot afford paying school fees, will have to rely on the public educational system. Arguably, for 60 to 80% of South Africa's children education reinforces marginalisation, making them second-class citizens<sup>64</sup>. Again, this raises the issue of being of historically advantaged or disadvantaged origin. There is a link between household resources and the children's performance in school. Although it is not the single most important indicator, a household with financial resources can provide certain necessities that make a positive impact on the child's school education<sup>65</sup>. Given the asymmetrical distribution of wealth in South Africa, it is not exclusively but above all formerly disadvantaged families that cannot provide necessary resources. Another factor is the reality that only 28% of black children have two parents in their household, whereas Coloured (50%), white (80%) and Indian children (83%) are far better off in terms of family relations. Matters are further complicated by the fact that especially rural and suburban schools experience difficulties in recruiting qualified teachers<sup>66</sup>. Another complicating factor is the 'language question'. Over the years, English has been established as the common language of instruction. Without denying the language's all-important role in an increasingly globalised world, mother-tongue education especially at primary school level has been neglected. At present, with English as the language of instruction most children are expected to learn through a second language before they have developed sufficient proficiency or competence in this language to make this possible. Criticism comes easy, yet a possible solution would be expensive and very difficult to implement. Ideally, a child receives instruction in his or her mother-tongue up to grade 7 and then switches to English as a

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<sup>61</sup> Wedekind, Volker, and Ken Harley. *Political Change, Curriculum Change and Social Formation*. P. 211.

<sup>62</sup> "The Global Competitiveness Report 2011-2012".

<http://www.weforum.org/reports/global-competitiveness-report-2011-2012>. P. 323.

<sup>63</sup> [www.southafrica.info](http://www.southafrica.info). "Education in South Africa". Accessed: 13.10.2011.

<http://www.southafrica.info/about/education/education.htm>.

<sup>64</sup> Sue Blaine quoted in: Bloch, Graeme. *The Complexity of System Change in Education*. P. 128.

<sup>65</sup> Carter, Jonathan. *Education in South Africa*. P. 26.

<sup>66</sup> Arends, Fabian, and Makhola Phurutse. Beginner Teachers in South Africa: School Readiness, Knowledge and Skills. Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2009. P. 23.

medium. This model, however favourable from a pedagogic point of view, would be a costly enterprise, because the system would have to cater for the eleven official languages recognized in the Constitution in terms of teachers and teaching materials. From a socio-cultural point of view, mother-tongue education would prevent a further breaking down of racial barriers as children would be separated along linguistic lines.

### **4.3. The role of teachers**

Teacher education and teacher performance fits well into the overall picture of the educational system. It would be totally inappropriate to blame teachers alone for the current state of affairs of the South African educational system. Yet, playing a crucial role, teacher education and performance will have to improve in order to provide quality education for all children. One of the biggest problems encountered by the educational system is not only the lack of qualified teaching staff, but also the lack of discipline among teachers which is reflected in absenteeism and the huge disparity of time that is spent on teaching<sup>67</sup>.

By definition, “teacher education is a kind of education which enables someone to become more competent in the professional practice of organising systematic learning”<sup>68</sup>. Systematic learning in turn, implies that teaching is far more than the mere presentation of content. In the time of learner-centred education, teaching has to be seen as classroom management where teachers provide for a learner-friendly environment in which alternatively autonomous learning, learning in pairs or learning in groups can take place. The content of learning has to be relevant, it has to be presented in its entirety and students have to acquire the knowledge in an explorative way. These requirements demand a great deal of competencies on behalf of teachers, such as a strong and properly grounded understanding and conception of the teaching profession involving ethical and moral standards, a special content knowledge, an understanding of how to make the content accessible, certain technical skills that allow for an appropriate presentation of the content, and, because of widespread poverty, the disruption of family life and HIV/AIDS, the caring function of teachers in South Africa needs special attention<sup>69</sup>. The Herculean task is faced with the disillusioning reality.

A huge number of beginner teachers (teachers with less than four years of teaching experience) leave their profession after a few years which is in most cases not only an unwelcome break in a person’s development, but also, measured against the costs of education, a clear waste of resources. Arend’s and Phurutse’s study of 2009 has shown that the first years in the teaching profession are crucial for the length of a career, for the quality of teaching (and consequently for learning) and for job satisfaction in general<sup>70</sup>. As in any other job, teachers need adequate training and preparation for the job they are required to fulfil. Due to the multitude of challenges, especially beginner teachers need special and institutionalised support. At present, there is no such institutionalised

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<sup>67</sup> According to a recent HSRC report, 20% of teachers are absent on Mondays and Fridays. Teachers in black schools spend only 3.5 hours per day teaching compared to 6.5 hours per day in old model C schools.

<sup>68</sup> Morrow, Wally. Learning to Teach in South Africa. P. 69.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. P. 4.

<sup>70</sup> Arends, Fabian, and Makhola Phurutse. Beginner Teachers in South Africa. P. 1.

support and it is left up to the schools to provide support in forms of a mentoring system or not. The present state is not acceptable if one takes into consideration that the obvious lack of support and the resulting stress of work are major reasons to leave the teaching profession. The study has shown that beginner teachers are not sufficiently equipped with 'soft skills' such as education theory, interpersonal relations, classroom management, handling of ill discipline and counselling<sup>71</sup>. On the one hand it is imperative for universities to provide graduates with such skills, on the other hand, work experience can make up for this omission. However, it is out of all reason why experienced teachers should not pass on their pedagogical knowledge to younger colleagues.

For the time being, we have to accept that the educational system is not living up to its full potential to provide quality education for all children in South Africa and is best described as 'huge spending with little benefit'. Many schools, above all in rural areas, do not have adequate supply of qualified teachers, whereas schools in urban areas attract the most qualified graduates from university. Due to deficient education and a number of pull factors (salary, working environment, etc.), many beginner teachers leave the teaching profession and the resultant challenge of filling vacant posts can hardly be mastered, because, at present, there are not enough teachers that are needed in order to make the educational system fit for its task to deliver quality education to every child and to play its role in the process of reducing inequality. Many findings will be reconfirmed in the assessment of the survey in the next chapter.

Implementing changes in the educational system is enormously complex and delicate, because every modification can have a negative effect on the students' performances. Especially in South Africa, the legacy of the past is not just a slogan, but a reality schools have to deal with on a daily basis<sup>72</sup>. Despite important changes and improvements, criticism comes easily and rightly. Just like South Africa's democratic system, also the educational system needs special care and attention. The transformation of the educational system is an unprecedented challenge and inevitably a costly and time consuming undertaking. In this process it is not enough to merely do the opposite of whatever was done in the past<sup>73</sup>. Instead, we have to take the past into account and draw the conclusions from its valuable lessons.

## 5. Case study

As part of my research, I undertook a survey with future history teachers at the School of Education at the University of Cape Town in October 2011. The students were all on the same stage of development: it was their last year at university and all of them completed the compulsory teaching phase of twelve weeks. The questionnaire was made up of nineteen questions divided into three categories. The first part intended to shed light on the students' perception of the role of history in the classroom. In the second part they were asked to answer questions about the educational system and their role as future teachers, with the last part concluding with their personal opinion on

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<sup>71</sup> Arends, Fabian, and Makhola Phurutse. *Beginner Teachers in South Africa*. P. 17ff.

<sup>72</sup> Bloch, Graeme. *The Complexity of System Change in Education*. P. 131.

<sup>73</sup> Morrow, Wally. *Learning to Teach in South Africa*. P. 27.

the performance of the educational system. The survey was conducted in the form of a classroom discussion where the students discussed the questions in an open and lively way.

The limitations of the survey are obvious: Firstly, the amount of data gathered was limited from the very beginning due to time constraints in the process of writing this paper. Secondly, the makeup of the class can hardly be seen as representative for South Africa. Twenty two white students are currently in their last year at the University of Cape Town and will be working as history teachers next year. Although I had initially hoped for a wider range of data and for a more representative sample, the data at hand is telling enough and sheds light on some important aspects of the educational system as the following evaluation hopefully shows. The composition of the class itself is also telling and confirms the current predicament of the educational system in general and of the (history) teaching profession in particular as I have already mentioned in the previous chapter. One has to conclude that the teaching profession does not attract enough students from all parts of society. Reasons for that are manifold, however, as the survey will show, the question of salary seems to be the prime cause for leaving the profession or for not even beginning a career as a teacher.

The first part of the questionnaire was aimed at getting information about the students' perception of the role of history in South Africa. Unanimously the students said that the educational system should attach more importance to history as a school subject in general and that the curriculum hardly provides an adequate framework to deal with the history of apartheid. The students also clearly indicated that history should not end with the election of 1994, but should instead include the adoption of the South African Constitution and the work of the *South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)*. The latter would have to play an important role when using the history classroom as a vehicle of promoting reconciliation, which is requested by most of the students and by some even seen as unavoidable. Yet, it has also been indicated that the work of the TRC should have to be seen more critically.

When asked for the most important steps of South African history that should be taught in school, the anti-apartheid movement and the move to democracy rank first. Seen as important are also the events leading up to apartheid, such as colonialism in South Africa, the wars of conquest, Bantu migration, the 1913 Land Act and the Mineral Revolution. Post-apartheid disillusionment and the depression of Afrikaner nationalism have also been mentioned as important parts of South African history.

The parts of South African history that supposedly arouse most interest among students are all war scenarios, the Soweto uprising involving students, the history of District Six, slave history and the history of Nelson Mandela. In reply to the question whether there are parts of South Africa's history that might give rise to feelings of discomfort or shame in the classroom, the students noticeably hesitated, nevertheless they came up with thoughtful answers. Judging from their own teaching experience, one had to take the age and the racial background of the children into consideration. They also mentioned that they themselves are sometimes overwhelmed by feelings of shame or anger when teaching certain aspects of South African history. This raises the question why the field of 'teaching the history of apartheid' does not receive special attention in the education for future teachers? They have to be prepared to handle situations in which at least parts of the class feel uncomfortable talking about or dealing with a certain aspect of history. Although only a minority of

the students have experienced directly “the heavy boot of apartheid”<sup>74</sup>, it is imperative as a teacher to remember that “the past is not a simple matter for most South Africans; most hold complicated and perhaps even inconsistent views about the country’s history”<sup>75</sup>. The ‘top 3’ of the parts of history that might give rise to feelings of discomfort or shame were: Afrikaner nationalism, the history of apartheid in general and racial segregation in particular.

The second part of the questionnaire sought to find out why the students want to be (history) teachers and how they perceive their role in the educational system. When asked for the primary motivation for becoming a history teacher, they came up with straightforward answers, such as “national service”, “love for children”, “personal interest” and “to understand and to put across the present”. Three of the 22 students would prefer to teach in independent schools, seven said they would prefer to teach in public schools. Only very few (three) see the teaching profession as a springboard for another career, the majority of them intends to be a teacher for a long period of time. However, most of them can name at least one reason to quit the teaching profession. The chief argument is that the salary that might be better in most other professions, followed by a high workload, lack of classroom discipline, class size, trouble with parents and the urge to compromise values and ideas. The students also admitted that they were afraid of some aspects of classroom life, such as burnout due to a high workload and unmanageable class sizes. It was generally held that teaching might evolve into mere ‘crowd-control’ where teachers are more concerned with disciplinary matters than with teaching of content. Some of the students were also concerned about not being able to get through to the class because they might not be “funny or interesting” enough. All of these concerns have to be taken into consideration when talking about teacher education. Most of these concerns will become reality in everyday school life. Therefore, it is crucial to provide adequate support especially in the very beginning of a career. The state of not having institutionalised support for beginner teachers is simply unbearable. The discussion has shown that all students would like to receive support in some form. The transition from being a student at university to being a teacher in school has to be as smooth as possible, which requires support for the new teachers from various sides. It has clearly been shown in Arends’ and Phurutse’s study of 2009<sup>76</sup> how the transition phase influences the length of a career, job satisfaction and consequently effectiveness and quality of teaching and learning.

The last part of the survey focused on the students’ personal opinion on the educational system. All students agreed on the fact that a purpose of the educational system should be to promote equality. Unfortunately, the consensus was that the system obviously fails to do so. Asked for where the system would have to improve, funding and distribution of money was named at the top of the list. The role of the teachers’ unions was also criticized for not being concerned about the quality of teaching and for protecting unsuitable teachers. The ‘language issue’ was also mentioned. Different levels of competencies in English as language of instruction complicate the situation in the classroom. It is clear from the above that the lack of institutionalised support for beginner teachers is also a point where the system needs to improve.

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<sup>74</sup> Gibson, James L. Overcoming Apartheid. P. 35.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid. P. 46.

<sup>76</sup> Arends, Fabian, and Makhola Phurutse. Beginner Teachers in South Africa: School Readiness, Knowledge and Skills. Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2009.

Despite the survey's obvious limitations, the following issues stand out as valuable lessons to be learnt: Teaching in South Africa is obviously not a profession that attracts members of all ethnic groups. The history of South Africa has to play a more prominent role in the classroom. The curriculum should also include aspects of the post-apartheid era, such as the adoption of the Constitution and the work of the TRC, albeit in a rather critical and unbiased way. Teachers have to be prepared adequately to teach the history of apartheid and be prepared to handle situations where children or teachers will be confronted with feelings of discomfort or shame. Finally, providing appropriate support for beginner teachers will help overcoming frightening aspects of classroom life and establish a solid basis for a long and successful career in the teaching profession.

## 6. Conclusion

"It is important to bear in mind that the main vision built into our constitution is that we will be a non-racial state. You can never be a non-racial state if, forever, race is to be a criteria."

- F W de Klerk -

For too long the notion of race has played a role in South Africa. Unfortunately, race was not just a notion or a label; it was *the* criteria determining a person's life situation. With the adoption of the Constitution, South Africa has formally left behind race as a criterion and embarked on a journey which is unprecedented in recent history. It is this very singularity South Africa seems to struggle with. Challenges ahead are partly the result of the legacy of the past. The country's most urgent educational problems have been addressed in this paper. I have tried to show that education has to play a key role in overcoming these problems. Unfortunately, the present state of affairs of the educational system does not necessarily facilitate this undertaking. It has to be of absolute priority to update the educational system in order to restore the role it has to play for society. In a nutshell: Quality education fosters democratisation and promotes social peace and stability. These, in turn, are preconditions for economic growth, employment and poverty reduction.

Indeed, South Africans have agreed on a singular way. The 'negotiated revolution' is by many seen as the greatest political achievement of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The country's reputation has changed and increased dramatically. As the powerhouse on the African continent, the further rise of South Africa seems to be a matter of mere formality. However, in order not to stumble over the past, progress will have to be as fair and inclusive as possible. The final chapter of this paper provides some ideas how the notion of a non-racial state can come true.

## **7. Suggestions**

The following suggestions are meant to be contributions to the current discussion on how to improve the South African educational system. Following the paper's overall line of argumentation, suggestions are three-fold in addressing: the educational system in its structural entirety; the sector of teacher education and performance, as well as the role of history as a school subject. According to the South African Constitution, education is a fundamental right for all South Africans. It would be desirable to have a system where at least up to the level of secondary education, parents should not have to worry about funding. For a family it is unbearable that a child's basic education causes financial trouble. Notwithstanding the fact that the South African educational system is inefficient in terms of value for money, it would be unwise to cut overall spending. Instead, there has to be a more cost-effective system that provides quality education to all children and special financial support for those in need.

### **7.1. Structural changes**

The development of a comprehensive school act where *all* aspects of the educational system are linked together should rank first. This would include school organisation, management and governance, labour issues, quality assurance, teacher education, teacher development and teacher performance. The resultant policy should put learners at the centre and should strengthen the public education system in order to close the current gap between public and independent schools while at the same time not affecting the performance of the educational elite in the country. There must be a clear schedule of responsibilities, granting sufficient responsibility and competencies to the principals. The role of the latter has long been neglected; however, examples have shown that good principals and a good school management team can make the difference. Special training for principals in form of a MBA for instance would be desirable to ensure that school management in every school is a reliable pillar in terms of delivering quality education.

A re-organisation of the schooling system is also worth considering given the current focus on one secondary school qualification. At present, matric seems to be the criteria somebody's life stands and falls with. A two-tier school system with matric as the higher degree granting immediate access to tertiary education and an alternative degree in grade 10 could ease the situation and reevaluate matric. Having said that, there have to be sufficient alternatives for those leaving school with a lower degree. To ensure that education does not end after grade 10, young professionals should be granted the opportunity to learn a profession properly by considering practical as well as theoretical aspects. This would involve establishing vocational schools that focus on the corresponding professional branches. At the same time, a two-tier school system has to be permeable, granting for instance graduates of vocational schools access to tertiary education in their field of specialisation. A two-tier school system could help reevaluating matric, it could provide an alternative way to a 'proper job' and it could produce sufficiently skilled workers the industry is short of.

In the course of a possible re-organisation, the advantages of all-day schools have to be taken into account, especially in the context of South Africa, where family structures are everything but

uniform. All-day care could help closing the qualitative gap between students of wealthy and poor families. I have already touched upon the correlation between performance and family background. Those children with an unstable family environment hardly receive support at home in terms of homework or exam preparation, partly because families are broken and parents are not at home to supervise homework or exam preparation or simply because parents themselves do not have the capacities to fulfil the task. I suggest that, especially in the light of differences in family structures, learning for the most part should take place in schools. Instead of leaving children alone with their homework in unknown circumstances, the whole process of consolidating what has been learnt should be supervised by competent and qualified staff, namely the teachers.

The 'language question' in the South African educational system is of crucial importance to the overall performance of the students. At present, there is no all-round solution to that problem. As I have already pointed out in chapter 4, English has been established as the common language of instruction. In this course, mother-tongue education especially at primary school level has been neglected. With English as the language of instruction, most children are expected to learn through a second language before they have developed sufficient proficiency in this language. At the same time, consolidation of a child's mother-tongue cannot take place on a school level with negative consequences for his or her cognitive abilities. Ideally, a child receives instruction in his or her mother-tongue up to grade 7 and then switches to English as medium of instruction. This model, however favourable from a pedagogic point of view, is difficult to implement and would be a costly enterprise. The system would have to cater for the eleven official languages recognized in the Constitution in terms of teachers and teaching materials. From a socio-cultural point of view, mother-tongue education could lead to a new form of separation along linguistic lines. In order to prevent such a separation and in order to ensure that every student receives mother-tongue education up to grade 7, the re-organisation of the educational system would also have to pay attention to the 'language question'. A possible facilitation of mother-tongue education in the framework of an inclusive educational system would see schools that are able to cater for at least three languages that are spoken in the particular region of the country. While providing instruction in a child's mother-tongue in core subjects, I see the possibility to mix school classes deliberately in minor subjects and make use of valuable insights of bilingual education. In this way, mother-tongue education could blend with the acquisition of English without establishing too much separation along linguistic lines.

Curriculum policy should also take the consolidation of democratic values into account. It has to be clear that the source of future democratic power, the people, is growing up in school. By implication, any state built upon democratic values has to pay special attention to a sound political education. In the context of South Africa where violations of basic human rights are an inherent part of the past, the deliberate promotion of the rights granted by the Constitution has to find expression in the curriculum. Not only should the subject of history make full use of that option, it has to be an interdisciplinary approach where the values enshrined in the Constitution are held in high esteem.

Since 1994, South Africa's educational system has come a long way and has implemented necessary and long overdue structural changes. That after all these changes the situation still leaves much to be desired, has partly to do with the way changes had been prepared and implemented in the past. In the future, changes have to be planned carefully and in a realistic way. One should not try to change an educational system overnight. All authorities will have to be briefed thoroughly and in

advance to make implementation as smooth and efficient as possible. Teaching staff needs special preparation and training to make sure that the desired effect reaches the students.

## **7.2. Teacher education**

In many respects is the teaching staff the centrepiece of the educational system. Teachers have to meet multiple requirements: They are supposed to have a special content knowledge. Ideally, they present the content in a pedagogically sound way in order to arouse interest and attention among students. They are required to have competencies in interpersonal dealings with students and parents. In short, they are instructors, mediators, authorities, entertainers and counsellors, at best simultaneously and on call. These requirements are real and teachers have to face up to them in the classroom on a daily basis. It goes without saying that not every teacher can comply with these requirements. Many teachers compensate for a missing requirement in some form or another. However, in order to be as close as possible to the ideal state of affairs, the educational landscape in South Africa has to change dramatically.

First of all, the teaching profession needs a serious increase in attractiveness. In many societies in the world, teachers are well respected members of society and form a solid part of the middle class. Of course, public acknowledgement has to be deserved through solid work; however, attractiveness also has to be promoted deliberately on behalf of the state. Teacher salary is certainly not enough to make the profession more attractive. On the other hand, any hard working teacher has to be able to provide his or her family with sufficient income. The fact that many beginner teachers leave the profession because of a higher income in other fields of work is very alarming. Given the all-important role of teachers in the educational system, the best graduates from secondary school level should be encouraged to pursue the course of becoming a teacher. Whether this happens through a financial incentive to become a teacher or not is not of primary concern, but one has to make sure that the most talented graduates at least think about joining the teaching profession. However, financial incentive could play a role especially when we look at schools in rural areas.

Another aspect is of course teacher education itself. South Africa needs more research on the relatively young field of university-based teacher education. It has to be made sure that universities provide for a uniform education to make sure that schools in every part of the country are equipped with identically skilled teachers. As some studies have shown, university-based teacher education has to focus more on pedagogical skills such as handling ill-discipline or providing counselling. Many beginner teachers find themselves being more concerned with disciplinary measures instead with actual teaching. Teacher education should not spare the more experienced teachers. They need further education on a regular basis to keep up to date with the latest insights in teaching methods and with possible changes in the curriculum.

Not only the field of teacher education, but also the existing teaching staff in schools has to play a more prominent role in providing adequate preparation and support for beginner teachers. The case study in chapter 5 has shown that beginner teachers are keen on getting any kind of support in their first years. A thorough system of institutionalised support has to be implemented to make sure that every beginner teacher is assigned to an experienced teacher who will help him or her in every situation. It goes without saying that every mentor needs to be qualified for that job. By providing

support in the first years, beginner teachers will be better equipped with crucial 'soft skills' that are necessary in the classroom. It will improve the quality of teaching, raise job satisfaction and will make sure that teachers stick to their profession for a long period of time. In the context of teacher preparation, it might also make sense to think about an extension of the scheduled 12 weeks of teaching experience during the time at university.

In order to maintain a high standard of teaching and learning, a teacher's performance has to be monitored on a regular basis. Although it might lead to feelings of discomfort especially among older teachers, a policy of continuing quality control is unavoidable. Given a thorough teacher education at university level, a mentoring system in the first years at school and offers for regular further training for experienced teachers, monitoring of teacher performance should be seen as support and approval rather than mere supervision.

### **7.3. Teaching South Africa's history**

History has to be granted a crucial role in the South African educational system, because it can make a valuable contribution to the country's sustainable development. However, history teaching is a very delicate issue and requires special attention when it comes to curriculum planning and teacher education.

As I have already touched upon in my fieldwork in chapter 5, history teacher education needs special attention. When dealing in depth with the history of South Africa, teachers should be prepared to handle difficult situations, where students or teachers themselves will be confronted with parts that give rise to feelings of discomfort, anger or shame. Therefore, they do not only need special content knowledge, but also pedagogical skills and sure instincts.

The ideal history curriculum in my opinion should put more emphasis on the history of South Africa in general. From a pedagogical point of view, it makes more sense to start with a student's own world of experience and then try to embed one's own history into a wider context of regional and global history. It makes even more sense to put special emphasis on the history of South Africa as the country clearly struggles with the process of coming to terms with the past. It is essential to provide an inclusive approach to history where each community is given a voice and where students can acknowledge that each community has its own unique historical roots<sup>77</sup>. It is a balancing act between involving all South Africans in core themes and leaving space for communal histories at the same time. Being in a state of transformation where the legacy of the past is still playing an important role in everyday life, the history curriculum in South Africa also has to include aspects of the post-1994 era. Landmarks such as the adoption of the South African Constitution and the work of the South African *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* have to be dealt with in an open, albeit critical way. Deliberately promoting reconciliation in the classroom might be impossible, yet providing students with a profound understanding of the past will hopefully challenge a further increase of inter-community relations. The history classroom can be a place where history is actually experienced. Although it requires a very careful preparation on behalf of history teachers, the

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<sup>77</sup> Bundy, Collin. *New Nation, New History?* P. 88.

integration of contemporary witnesses and museums can make a valuable contribution to a holistic approach to history.

In the process of providing an adequate framework to deal with the history of the country, the history curriculum should also make room for the teaching about the educational system itself. As I have described in chapter 4, educational policies in the 20<sup>th</sup> century have done much to enforce racial segregation, therefore, it is important to highlight these issues. Ideally, students acknowledge the importance of a sound education when being confronted with the system's role in the past. They should also learn about the inspiring role of students during the struggle against apartheid.

It has to be part of history lessons, predominantly in higher classes, to leave space for abstract reflections on the subject itself. It should emphasize the interrelation of the past, the present and the future. Furthermore, it should convey that history and the knowledge of the past are constructed individually. This would involve reflections on the role of history during the 'heyday' of apartheid, the role it played during the struggle against apartheid and the changes and advances in the discipline of history in the post-apartheid era. History has to reflect the diversity of the population and account for processes that have created a single society. It should locate the history of South Africa in regional, continental and global contexts, events and processes.

When talking about the ideal history textbook, one has to recognize that the book itself will not lead to a world of bliss. The quality of a textbook does not only depend on its content, it depends above all on how the teacher uses it<sup>78</sup>. It goes without saying that a textbook should not be a teacher's second nature. A teacher should be competent and creative enough to come up with his or her own relevant material in order to make classroom life as exciting and diversified as possible. As already mentioned in the paragraph on curriculum development, more emphasis has to be put on the South African history. According to the above mentioned curriculum, the content of the textbook (selection of texts, photos, documents, etc.) has to acknowledge, reflect and present the diversity of the country. Only then can a textbook help establishing a new and more inclusive narrative of the past reflecting South Africa's heterogeneous society<sup>79</sup>.

The closing paragraph on the improvement of the South African educational system is dedicated to Gordon Allport's Contact Hypothesis. In essence, Allport's theory claims that through a well-managed contact between groups that have experienced conflict in the past, tensions can be reduced and intergroup relations are likely to improve. Bearing the insights of the theory in mind, the schooling system has to be the place where children of different cultural backgrounds meet in order to break down racial barriers and to make sure that the main vision of the South African Constitution reveals its full potential.

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<sup>78</sup> Chapman, Audrey R. *Afterword*. P. 323.

<sup>79</sup> Cole, Elizabeth A. *Introduction*. P. 20f.

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