

IMPLICATIONS OF COTEP'S NORMS AND STANDARDS ON TEACHER EDUCATION FOR THE SCHOOL SUBJECT HISTORY

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The acceptance of the *Norms and Standards and Governance Structures for Teacher Education* document by the Committee on Teacher Education in

July 1995 has changed education in South African schools dramatically. The acceptance of the Norms and Standards directly implies that a process-based,

skills approach is now required throughout all subjects in all South African schools. The Norms and Standards document does not merely review and revise the previous *Criteria for the Evaluation of South Africa Qualifications for Employment in Education*, which has dominated teacher training for the past two decades in South Africa, but involves a radical paradigm shift. Whereas the previous *Criteria* presented a product-orientated input model, the *Norms and Standards* presents an output approach to teacher education. Where the previous basic aim of education according to the *Criteria* involved enculturation, the basic aim of the *Norms and Standards* involves personal empowerment. The paradigm shift rendered hereby places the acquisition of life-skills at the centre of the curriculum.¹

Although the *Norms and Standards* document in its present form is not to be accepted as the final policy on Teachers' Education, as it is clearly stated that the document will be constantly reviewed and revised, a blueprint for teacher education has nevertheless been provided. The intention to provide specific norms and standards for those engaged in teacher education has been satisfied. Current issues have been incorporated such as the fact that backlogs in the South African school system have to be redressed, that student teachers need to acquire an in-depth knowledge of academic subjects and that all class teachers need to be able to handle the special needs of individual children in their classes.²

The *Norms and Standards* provides for a large measure of autonomy in the implementation of agreed-upon aims, competences and criteria within the various Teacher Education Institutions, but the ends or outputs of Teacher Education are specified. The fundamental aim is to educate and train teachers to teach effectively in order to facilitate learning, recognising the full complexity of the South African context. This will require teachers to teach in accordance with the stated goals of education as well as the particular ethos of their schools. Effective teaching is seen to require a knowledge of the learning process and the acquisition of appropriate dispositions, knowledge, skills, values and attitudes which take cognisance of the political, economic, environmental and social context in which the teaching and learning are to occur.³ The aims and competences for teacher education programmes are described in terms of knowledge, skills and values, but the categories of knowledge, skills and values are not mutually exclusive, but are to be interactive. These categories are to be seen holistically: knowledge contributes to a more meaningful realisation of skills, while both knowledge and skills are linked to the attitudinal component insofar as change in the former may effect a change in the latter.

On the other hand, attitudes or dispositions which are based upon a value system, screen the acceptability of knowledge and skills. The categories of knowledge, skills and values are specified in terms of defined outcomes or competences, which are again directly related to knowledge, skills (which include communication, methodology, management, assessment) and values relating to the school and professionalism.⁴

It is clearly stated that Teacher Education should develop teachers with a sense of vision which reflects values aimed at enabling pupils to develop as persons well informed, rational, reflective, critical choosers and yet tolerant and compassionate human beings who have the courage to take risks, the fortitude to handle failure and a belief in the value of life.⁵ The basic paradigm shift therefore implies that the role of the teacher in the South African Education system will be basically to assist the pupil in the acquisition of life-skills to enable him to cope effectively in adulthood. This basic assumption corresponds with education theory in several other leading countries⁶ and set the South African Education course also firmly on a process-based approach.

2. HISTORY'S ACCEPTANCE

For the subject History the acceptance of the *Norms and Standards* embodies several important implications and History on all levels is affected by it. **In the first place the acceptance of history as part of the school curriculum is hereby clearly confirmed.** In the debate on the acceptance of a social studies course in South Africa, history as such has clearly been victorious and is to continue as part and parcel of the curriculum.

In the second place the *Norms and Standards* also puts an end to the debate in history circles in South Africa for and against the process approach by officially endorsing the process approach. This clearly implies that a paradigm shift within history from a product-knowledge basis in the past to a skills-process basis in the future is clearly underway. This paradigm shift is not causing such great ripples within the subject field of history compared to several other subject fields at the moment, as historians since the early 1980s had been campaigning for the incorporation of this approach within history and several provinces, such as Kwazulu-Natal, are already well on their way towards incorporating this approach.⁷ The debate within historical circles regarding history as process will, however, not cease with the official acceptance of the process approach, but will clearly change in nature as aspects of the postmodernist debate are becoming much more evident in South African historical circles.⁸

The third change affecting history is also an issue which has long been debated within historical circles, namely the value of history. The *Norms and Standards* also officially endorses an output mode here. What is clearly implied is that the input should be of such a nature that the output of the receiver is to embody the norms and standards which COTEP endorses. History teaching is therefore no longer tied to a specific knowledge base which has dominated history in the past and which students had to produce in order to pass, but to prove that history as a subject provides specific training in life-skills which will enable the learner to cope effectively. The content thus serves as the field from which the skills are to develop, but in this practice not only behaviouristic learning will take place, but cognitive concepts will also emerge which will form a conceptual framework that will enable the learner to cope effectively. In this sense History has for some time been endorsing several skills which are of utmost relevance in the formation of this conceptual framework - to mention only History's emphasis on empathy, the handling of controversy, the handling of the multi-interpretative and dialectical nature of History, etc. In this regard the work of especially Hilary Cooper provides excellent research on historical skills, the cognitive development which underlies these skills and strategies, as well as its implementation within the school curriculum.⁹

Fourthly, the acceptance of the *Norms and Standards* will clearly affect History departments throughout South Africa. Not only Education Departments but academic History Departments have to take cognisance of the change from a product to a process approach in the school history. In South Africa it is also accepted that the universities teach the *Higher History*, which is the "real" academic subject History, while educational institutions and schools are somewhat associated with the *Lower History*, "some form" of the *Higher History* but not quite the same.¹⁰ If the educational institutions and schools are now forced to change the *Lower History* to a process approach, the *Higher or academic History* will be forced to follow suit, because the vast majority of their students of History are trained mainly for the education profession.¹¹ This also brings to the fore a very peculiar situation in universities whereby the professional historians in the History Departments of the universities, concern themselves mainly with the teaching and researching of the academic History, while the Methodology of History is taught mainly by educationists within the Departments of Education of the same universities. In a minority of departments of History, individual historians involve themselves with both aspects, but in the majority cases historians are not very concerned nor familiar with education theory. Therefore very often the latest research

regarding History Methodology is not reviewed nor practised at all by the History Departments, who often frown on the "expertise" of the Education Departments of the same university. However, the Methodology taught in the Education Departments involves the skills practised by the professional historian also including education theory into these courses. As the skills involved and practised by history, are the skills of the professional historian and since Methodology of History has to teach these skills, **who is better equipped to teach them than the professional historian within the History Department of the University**, but with full cognisance of education theory? In this particular instance the *Lower History* institutions are, maybe, in a more favourable position, where often due to the lack of staff effectively curbing specialisation, Academic History and History Methodology are practised by the same person, which automatically leads to interactivity. The time is, however, running out for any lecturer or teacher in History to deliver his in-depth focus on some aspect of history to his students, hoping that some of this product will find its way into their receptive minds, without taking cognisance of the education theories and the process involved in this deliverance. If History is to follow a skills approach, as now officially required from *Lower History* institutions by the education authorities, the *Higher History* and tertiary education authorities will have to follow suit and present their academic History in accordance with the Methodology of History - or face the consequences that academic History will be training students to cope with History as Academic subject, but not the History taught at school level, which now embodies life-skills and competencies. Course plans therefore will need careful deliberation and the Methodology of History teaching will have to form a prominent part of these deliberations.¹²

3. IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHERS TRAINING

The above arguments on some implications regarding the implementation of the *Norms and Standards* for History in South Africa bring to the fore two important aspects closely related to the South African situation in particular. The first deals with the specific conditions within the South African education system and the second with the implementation of the skills approach in History within this education system. It serves no purpose here to discuss all the reasons for the unfavourable position South African schools find themselves in at present; it suffices to state that a massive backlog still prevails in the greater majority of South African schools and this situation will continue to exist for some time. This backlog in facilities only, not to mention the lack of relevant

teaching aids nor the ratio of pupils per teacher, creates an extremely unfavourable position for the implementation of a skills approach at present. There are schools at present which are in a better position, in terms of facilities and ratios, to employ a skills approach, but in all schools in South Africa teacher training provides a real problem. At this very moment very few teachers in the South African school system, especially in the primary schools, are equipped nor trained to employ a process approach. As the emphasis in the past has been on enculturation and the knowledge product, teachers in the schools, which often at this very moment face confusing circumstances and insecurity, cling to these old forms as these are the only standards whereby they can justify their own teaching. As the *Norms and Standards* only affects teacher training as from the first-year intake of 1996, teachers trained in the process mode will only be available in South African schools from 1999 onwards, with the phasing in of the three-year education diplomas as a minimum requirement for teacher education. This also implies that a small minority of the teacher population in 1999 will be equipped to employ a process approach. The only answer to these training problems seems to be offered by well organised extensive and intensive in-service-training and retraining courses.

Secondly, few teacher training institutions are already geared to employ alternative education theories in 1996, theories which in many cases still need to be assembled, in the light of the backlogs and uneven distribution of funds and staff associated with previous administrations in South Africa. Teacher training institutions are always facing rationalisation and amalgamation at present; again affects job security and the willingness of teacher trainers to embark on new methods.

Thirdly, although several series of textbook or workbooks have been published in several subjects very recently on the process approach, the finalisation of core curriculums in the various subjects still hampers book and material publications. Interim syllabi are still in operation in the schools with only sensitive issues removed and only when syllabi have been finalised can the relevant documents be developed and filtered down to the schools. Adding to this problem is the fact that some publishers are only altering existing textbooks slightly to remove controversial material and then present these altered old product-approach textbooks to schools in the guise of what the new process-approach entitles. No wonder that at a very recent workshop on History teaching in Gauteng, the consensus of the assembled history teachers was that history teaching has changed little within the schools and that only superficial changes have to be affected to their existing notes and

worksheets to incorporate some of the "new" syllabus material, without realising that the underlying fabric implied a complete paradigm shift!

However, despite these difficulties, which hamper the implementation of a process approach in the schools, the position of History in particular is again somewhat better than those of several other subject fields in the school system. The examples provided by the introduction of process-based History in other countries during the 1980s, especially the implementation of the Schools Council Project in the UK, to name but one example, have provided South Africa with a vast library of literature on the problems, implementation and consequences of a skills approach. A vast number of international journals contain ample literature on all aspects of these implementations.¹³ Criticism of this approach has also provided very important factors to be considered and in this case Keith Jenkins' *Rethinking History* is of utmost relevance.¹⁴

The subject field of History has also been subject to continuous and innovative research by South African historians, academics and teachers, who in the process of their research have already adapted much of this literature to the South African context. In these articles, delivered mainly at History Conferences since the middle 1980s and published in History and Education journals, much of the groundbreaking aspects concerning a process approach in History teaching have already been covered. The school subject field of History is therefore in a much more fortunate position than that of other subjects as it can draw on the productive contributions of a vast number of authors writing from within the South African context. It is of particular interest to mention the work of the History Workshop at Wits and several similar approaches at other universities and institutions; that of Matthews and his various panels in KwaZulu Natal, Worden, Glacherty, Ludlow, Potenza, Mahomed, Van der Merwe, Akojee, Mbenga regarding the skills and process approach, that of Kallaway, Kapp, Joubert, Broodryk, Trümpelmann, Van Eeden, Visser, De Villiers, and Saunders on the value of History teaching; Siebörger on History textbooks; Gründlingh, Cuthbertson and Alexander on the core curriculum; Van der Merwe and Foster with their multi-media package on the training of history teachers; Roth, Mulholland and Ludlow on guidelines to overcome the dilemmas facing South African history and Brits on doing History. The above overview forms only a small part of the extensive literature published on change in History teaching in South Africa, covering both content and process.¹⁵

Regarding the teaching of competencies and life-skills in History and History Methodology it is possible to say that national and international experiments have proven that competencies can be taught explicitly. Education theorists whose work is of the utmost importance for History teaching include Piaget and his Development Phases, Bruner and the Conceptual Thinking involved in his Spiral Curriculum, Ausubel and his Advanced Organiser theories, Taba and her Induced Thinking Strategies, Vygotsky's control of the use of language as well as Feuerstein strategies on Cognitive Development and De Bono's strategies on Thinking Skills. By using these and several other learning theorists' findings and incorporating these theories into history content, it is possible to address competencies explicitly. If students are explicitly aware of the skill under development, they can master this skill openly as well as reflect on the cognitive processes which led to the mastering of the skill.¹⁶ Although the ideal remains that skills should develop implicitly, the given situation in South African schools call at this stage for attention to be given to skills explicitly.¹⁷

In a skills approach the question has often been asked whether the process can be distinguished from the product? Can the skills therefore be distinguished from the content which is used to develop or strengthen the specific skill? **In History they cannot really be distinguished and process can only be studied using particular content.** In the case of history this content therefore has to be the content prescribed in the core syllabus, but that specific content can be presented in such a way that the presenter can focus specifically on the skill which should be developed or strengthened. This can be done by controlling the difficulty as well as the language level of the content and the teacher can ensure that the focus throughout the presentation emphasises the skill. This practical approach to combine skills and content aims to develop what is known in education theory as conceptual strategies. A conceptual strategy therefore involves both the cognitive skill of how to deal with the knowledge as well as the knowledge itself. Developing or strengthening the strategy implies that in a later situation the student can use exactly the same conceptual strategy on different content, alter it to suit the requirements of that specific situation and develop further conceptual strategies or strengthen the existing one. In History this implies that the skills of the

historian to deal with time, space, values, evidence, cause and effect, similarity, difference, etc. can be applied to specific content and in that application can develop higher-order conceptual strategies such as the ability to compare, to analyse, to evaluate, etc. These conceptual strategies are in the end what is implied by the competencies stipulated in the *Norms and Standards*; they are life-skills and they enable the learner to cope effectively in life by applying the strategies developed and strengthened in the history classroom.¹⁸

Finally the development of conceptual strategies in the History classroom is possible, no matter the size of the group, the facilities available or the teaching and learning aids available, **provided** that the history teacher knows what he/she is doing and controlling the entire input to affect the output of his students. This simultaneously warns us that it is unfair of the professional historian in his history class to expect his or her students to have mastered a conceptual strategy. The student may be required to master comparison, but if the teacher has not presented the content in such a way as to allow the student to focus on the underlying skills of cause, effect, similarity, difference, etc., which constitute the conceptual strategy of comparison, the student will not understand let alone master the process. The teacher should also provide the opportunity for his students to reflect, within controlled conversation, on the cognitive processes involved in this application, before he requires of them to repeat this entire process on different content in order to strengthen the strategy. If we are to teach pupils in History to develop basic skills, the situation in South African education at this stage requires such teaching to be done explicitly. Should we add postmodernist theories at present, which argue that history is not the past but actually consists of the working achievements of the historian, who is more equipped to teach these achievements than the professional historian himself?¹⁹

The implications of this *Norms and Standards* document are great for the historian, breathing new life and interest into a subject which in the past has been used by all those in the wider context of the population in order to further their own ideologies. Now the professional historian can use the information available to teach thinking processes and learners can be empowered to think for themselves.

LITERATURE

1. Committee on Teacher Education Policy (COTEP), **Norms and Standards Governance Structures for Teacher Education**, July 1995, p. 1.
2. *Ibid.*, p.2.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

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| <p>4. Ibid., pp. 15 - 27.</p> <p>5. Ibid., p. 12.</p> <p>6. See especially the UK, the Netherlands, the USA and Israel.</p> <p>7. See J. Matthews, Historical Skills: Fact or Fiction? and J. Nisbet A Classroom Approach to Developing Historical Skills presented at the SAHA Conference, Stellenbosch, 1994.01.20.</p> <p>8. Reference to several papers delivered at the SAHS Conference at Grahamstown in July 1995.</p> <p>9. H.Cooper, <i>The Teaching of History</i>, London, David Fulton, 1992.</p> <p>10. See S. Connor, <i>Postmodernist Culture</i>, London, Blackwell, 1989, - especially the chapter on Postmodernism and the Academy, pp. 3-23.</p> <p>11. Statistics provided by UNISA, UP, RAU and VISTA prove this point.</p> | <p>12. See G. Connell-Smith and H.A. Lloyd, <i>The Relevance of History</i>, London, Heinemann, 1972 on a similar argument regarding the position of History in the UK.</p> <p>13. Reference to the History Today and Teaching History journals among international journals.</p> <p>14. K. Jenkins, <i>Rethinking History</i>, London, Routledge, 1991.</p> <p>15. Reference to Yesterday and Today, Historia and the Historical Journal as well as several Education journals.</p> <p>16. Research conducted by Vista's Centre for Cognitive Development verify these findings.</p> <p>17. Reference is especially made here to the CCERSA seminar on Subject Methodologies held at JCE in 1995, where a concept approach to teaching and learning was discussed in depth.</p> <p>18. Ibid.</p> <p>19. See K. Jenkins, <i>Rethinking History</i>.</p> |
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