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In defence of history as a school subject

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In view of the fact that the majority of learners terminate their study of history at the end of the General Education and Training phase (Grade 9), active steps should be taken by history practitioners and important role-players to prevent the subject from becoming extinct in government schools. It is no longer sufficient justification to say, for example, that some learners enjoy history or that educators are now using an unparalleled variety of methods. There is a need for an adequate and effective promotional strategy to "sell" history in government schools. It must not only convince adult sceptics, whether inside or outside the staff room, but also give learners at the end of the General Education and Training phase reasons to consider choosing to study history in the Further Education and Training phase (Grades 10 to 12).

Ter verdediging van geskiedenis as 'n skoolvak

In die lig van die feit dat die meeste leerders hulle studie van geskiedenis aan die einde van die Algemene-Onderwys-en-Opleidingsfase (Graad 9) staak, behoort aktiewe stappe deur geskiedenispraktisyns en die vernaamste rolspelers geneem te word om te voorkom dat geskiedenis in openbare skole uitsterf. Dit is nie meer voldoende om byvoorbeeld te sê dat sommige leerders geskiedenis geniet of dat opvoeders tans 'n verskeidenheid onderrigmetodes gebruik nie. Daar is 'n behoefte aan 'n omvattende en effektiewe bemarkingstrategie om geskiedenis in openbare skole te bevorder, wat nie alleen die volwasse skeptici buite sowel as binne die personeelkamer sal oortuig nie, maar aan leerders aan die einde van die Algemene-Onderwys-en-Opleidingsfase redes sal gee om die bestudering van geskiedenis in die Verdere-Onderwys-en-Opleidingsfase (Grade 10 tot 12) te oorweeg.

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A former South African Minister of Education, Prof K Asmal (2001: 3), made the following remark regarding the status of history as a subject in South African government schools:

> [...] history teaching today follows the pattern of the past, that is, rote learning, lack of imagination, lack of excitement and, ultimately, a lack of interest among learners is the order of the day.

The decline in the status of history, both in educational circles and in society at large, is neither a contemporary phenomenon nor peculiar to South Africa. In the issue of the *Ons Taal* magazine dated 15 January 1908, G F Marais noted that history teachers were teaching the subject

> [...] op droge en lustelose manier ... . In plaas van di vak boeiend en lewendig voor te hou, gee di onderwyser 'n lang lijs van datums om uit die hoof te leer. Die kind kry daar 'n afskrik in en haat dit later (Van Jaarsveld 1976: 1).

Some sixty years later, an article by Mary Price (1968) called "History in danger", appeared in the October 1968 issue of *Teaching History*, the journal of the British Historical Association. It focused on the fact that history practitioners were being obliged, by the curriculum reforms then in vogue,[1] to question the purpose and method of history teaching in the classroom (Price 1968: 342). The article, though condemned by some as unrealistically pessimistic, has proved in retrospect both prophetic and constructive. For history has since then fought an ongoing battle to ensure its place not only as a separate subject in the school curriculum, but also "for a place in the minds and interests of the young" (Schools Council History 13-16 Project 1972: 7).

The decline in history as a subject in South African government schools was signified by the fact that it eventually not only failed to be ranked as a core subject in the curriculum but had to struggle hard for its survival on the list of optional subjects in many schools (Asmal 2001: 4). Strenuous attempts were made to render the subject more relevant to the needs of the late twentieth century, with many history conferences in the 1990s taking as their theme the defence of the subject (Bam 1993:

1 To counteract the problems involved in the traditional approach to history teaching, innovative movements such as the New History Movement emerged in Britain, focusing on new methods of teaching designed to make the subject challenging and stimulating.

15). In the outcomes-based approach to education implemented in 1998, history as a discipline falls under social sciences, and is presented as a compulsory part of this learning area in the General Education and Training phase (GET, Grades 1 to 9), using its own learning outcomes, assessment standards, methods, and concepts. In the Further Education and Training phase (FET, Grades 10 to 12) it is one of the optional school subjects taught separately by means of its own learning outcomes, assessment standards, methods, and concepts (Dept of Education 2003: 9-10, SASHT 2002: 5-6). However, in many secondary schools it has already been disposed of in Grades 10, 11 and 12 (Dept of Education 2003: 5, SASHT 1999: 14). After exploring the issue of history as a disadvantaged discipline and subject in universities and schools, Wilson (1999: xi) concludes:

> History as an academic discipline and school subject is clearly not what it used to be, but rather than ponder its disintegration practitioners should explore the possibilities which remain.

One such attempt is a poem entitled "Don't teach history", published in the final 2004 Newsletter of the South African Society for History Teaching as part of a shock strategy to seek support for present-day endeavours among history scholars and practitioners to promote history as a subject in South African government schools (Ntabeni 2004: 18).[2]

1. Methodology

1.1 Statement of the problem

Most young South Africans today grow up in a "permanent present", lacking any meaningful connection to the public past of the times they live in (SASHT 1999: 2, SASHT 2002: 3-4). According to the Report of the History/Archaeology Panel (Dept of Education 2000: 5-6), there is a general and pervasive discrediting of the value of history as a subject. While the learners surveyed would generally acknowledge that history is "interesting" or even "important", they did not perceive any connection between the history learned in school and the significance of current affairs programmes, contemporary political events or even news on the economy. According to Bam (2000: 18), only a small minority of

2 It includes the lines: "History is a pile of rubbish / Don't study rubbish in school".

more advanced learners in a case study indicated that they study history because it has meaning, or is "relevant to life". There is also an influential perception among parents that studying history, as opposed to accounting and mathematics, is "not relevant" to secure future careers for their children. This has had a particularly gendered impact, narrowing the learning paths of male learners, many of whom have developed an aversion to studying history. From 1997, history teaching also suffered from the corrosive effects of rationalisation and teacher redeployment when the new *Post Provisioning Norms* were applied. When hard decisions have to be made under the imperative of economic austerity, mathematics and the natural sciences are given protective priority and humanities subjects like history are marginalised (Asmal 2001: 5-7, Dept of Education 2000: 16). The previous government's utilisation of history as an ideological tool to strengthen its hold over its citizens also impugned the legitimacy of history in the school curriculum (Taylor 1993: 92).

According to Twala (2004: 7), many South Africans feel: "Get rid of History as a subject in public schools, [...] let's turn our backs on the past and leave the [...] past behind. [...] Focus on the future". But Twala (2004: 7), confirming Walter Benjamin's (1970) catastrophic view of history as set out in the ninth of the "Theses on the philosophy of history", considers such a move dangerous. According to Benjamin (1970: 12), "the angel of history has his face turned towards the past", and "where a chain of events appears to us", the angel "sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and join together what has been smashed to pieces." This would, according to Benjamin, presumably mean the end of history. But Benjamin (1970: 13) continues: "a storm is blowing from Paradise" and "irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of ruins before him grows skyward. What we call progress is this storm."

The History/Archaeology Panel (Dept of Education 2000: 8) also cautions that history is presently being given scant attention in schools and that learners are thus being prevented from gaining a critical historical awareness of themselves and their society:

> Should the formal study of history be ignored in the present, one may well run the risk of 'robbing' the future generations of the essential knowledge and skills to contribute to sustaining an open, equitable and tolerant society.

Historical amnesia is not a cure for South Africa's problems; it is just another disorder. South Africans need to explore the past in order to identify things that need to change, see what sort of redress might be required, and know where they have been to ensure that they never go there again. History is the only school subject in which, according to Bam & Visser (2002: 6), one can "think things through".

Since the majority of learners today terminate their study of history at the end of the General Education and Training phase (Grade 9), active steps should be taken by history practitioners to prevent the subject from facing extinction in government schools. It is no longer sufficient justification to say, for example, that some learners enjoy history or that educators are now using an unprecedented variety of methods. What is required of history educators is an adequate and effective promotional strategy to sell history in government schools — not only to convince adult sceptics inside or outside the staffroom, but also to give learners in the General Education and Training phase (Grades 7 to 9) reasons to consider studying history in the Further Education and Training phase (Grades 10 to 12, Verner 2004: 5-6). Against this backdrop, therefore, the following research problem can be formulated: What strategies can history practitioners implement to overcome prevailing misconceptions regarding the value and importance of history as a school subject and to raise its standing in the South African schooling system?

1.2 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this article is thus to review and discuss scholars' views on ways to promote history as a subject in government schools and to raise its standing in the South African schooling system. The outcomes of the literature review may be used:

- to empower and support history practitioners defending and selling the subject successfully in a highly competitive curricular marketplace, and encouraging and inspiring more learners, especially those in Grades 10, 11 and 12, to study history;
- to inform policy-makers, public bodies, education administrators and curriculum developers about the current innovations in history teaching, and

- to demonstrate to the abovementioned role-players as well as to parents that history is an exciting, interesting and multi-skilled subject.

To this end the article intends to provide guidelines to develop wholehearted, positive attitudes and approaches to defending and selling the subject in the curricular marketplace of the twenty-first century; to put forward promotional materials which can assist in conveying the argument for teaching and learning history, and to provide practical examples of how to bring history to life in government schools, so that learners enjoy history and are motivated to participate actively in history study in the Further Education and Training phase (Grades 10, 11 and 12).

1.3 Clarification of concepts

Any study on history teaching and learning has to start by defining the core concepts.

1.3.1 History

The concept of history, as commonly used, has three levels of meaning. First, it can connote the entire human past as it actually happened. Secondly, it can connote humankind's attempt to study, describe and interpret that past: it is, in the words of Barraclough (1955: 15) "the attempt to discover on the basis of fragmentary evidence the significant things about the past". It is in this sense that the original Graeco-Latin word *historia* as coined by Herodotus applies. The Greek historian asked questions wherever he went and a narrative composed by him soon became known as *historia* — knowledge acquired through investigation. Thirdly, it can indicate the systematic study of history, *ie* history as an academic discipline, a term reserved for a more precise task involving a precision of documentation and a rigorous application of critical techniques and methodology (Marwick 1970: 15).

1.3.2 Teaching and history teaching

Akinpelu (1981: 190) defines the concept of teaching as

> ... the conscious and deliberate effort by a mature or experienced person to impart information, knowledge and skills [...] to an immature or less experienced person, with the intention that the latter will learn or come to believe what he/she is taught on good grounds.

Gunter (1980: 10), in turn, defines teaching as

> ... an activity by which a human being, usually, but not necessarily a child or youth [...] is taught by another person, as a rule [...] an adult to know certain things.

A combination of these two viewpoints defines the authentic nature of teaching: the teaching act comprises two activities, namely, instruction and learning, which are inseparably linked. Teaching is not a one-sided activity in which only the teacher is active while the learner remains passive: both teacher and learner are actively involved (Fraser *et al* 1991: 27-8). Yet, while it is generally conceded that good instruction enhances learning, the importance of proper learning procedures is not always acknowledged. Van der Stoep (1972: 24) emphasises the fact that there is, indeed, much more to learning than instruction. Because this is so, it is incumbent upon the teacher to pay special regard to the psychological aspects of learning, and to the possible ways that effective learning can take place in the classroom.

The concept of history teaching comprises two components: history and teaching. Two scientific fields are thus involved: on the one hand, the science which occupies itself with the discipline known as history and, on the other, the science which studies teaching and learning, didactics (Rüsen 1993: 187). According to Mathews *et al* (1991: 1-5), the concept of history teaching entails the following:

> [A] teaching methodology inside and outside the history classroom in which knowledge, skills, concepts and attitudes play a dominant role [...] a learner-centred and skills-based approach where learners in effect become young historians carrying out in an uncomplicated way the methods of the historian [...] analysis and interpretation [...] to serve the interest of present-day society.

2. Literature review: promoting history in government schools

With the implementation of Curriculum 2005 in 1998 the debate on the status of history as a school subject went public, no longer being confined to history scholars and practitioners (Dept of Education 1998: 15). All role-players now have a great deal of influence over curricular matters, directly and indirectly: parents, for example, are now giving their children advice about subject choice, which could affect the status and position

of history as a subject in South African government schools. Brooks *et al* (1993: 4-5), discussing a similar situation in British schools in the 1990s, advised British history educators as follows:

> the value of history as a school subject should be constantly and publicly argued [...] targeting [...] parents, students, employers [...] or other interested groups ...

A close reading of the literature pertaining to this issue confirms Brooks *et al*'s (1993: 4-5) advice: the tried and tested way to promote history as a school subject is, firstly, to argue the value of history constantly and publicly to all role-players and, secondly, to present a continuing and convincing case for history to young people. An elaboration of the recommended promotional strategy follows.

2.1 Arguing the value of history constantly and publicly to role-players

According to scholars,[3] to argue the value of history successfully to the most important role-players in South Africa, history scholars and practitioners should develop wholehearted, positive attitudes and approaches as well as designing the necessary promotional materials to use at option evenings, career fairs, open days, and so forth.

2.1.1 Developing wholehearted, positive attitudes and approaches

According to Brooks *et al* (1993: 4-7), Nicol (1984: 7) and Petty (1993: 18-20), history educators may be inclined to begin with the arguments for studying history as a school subject, but this is unlikely to be the best starting point for many, especially those who are new to the profession. What the experienced communicator recognises is that the effectiveness of what is said depends as much on how it is said and on the perceptions and impressions others have of the person presenting the argument as it does on the quality of the argument itself. The best method, then, is not to examine the arguments themselves but to consider which aspects will assist a favourable response to them.

3 Cf Brooks *et al* 1993, Coltham & Fines 1971, Dickinson *et al* 1984, Everdell 2005, Guhl 2000, Morris 2003, Nicol 1984, Petty 1993, Reynolds *et al* 2004, Stearns 2005, and Steele 1983.

According to scholars such as Brooks *et al* (1993: 4-7), Guhl (2000: 13-5) and Morris (2003: 25-7), history educators should start with their own strengths, because they have already developed considerable expertise within the classroom which can provide a good basis for effective communication outside it. They should also be positive, and think about how history can be promoted as a school subject, instead of fixating on a myriad of reasons why it cannot. People who think positively are often proved right. They must be aware that they will not be able to convince everybody at once; but failure to please everyone must not dent their self-confidence when it is really impossible to do so. History educators must remain enthusiastic in their efforts to convince others, and be receptive to feedback from their "audience". If interest and attention begin to drift, they must be willing to reduce the length and detail of the argument, introduce new material (such as examples of learners' work), or just listen to what others have to say. The history educator's personal appearance matters. Those whom they seek to persuade have certain expectations of educators: they should look like professionals. What they say will count very little if they look unconvincing to the group or individual whom they are addressing.

Finally, history educators should cover enough ground to show their skills. They should also put themselves in the position of those making the decisions from which they hope to benefit: What are their main concerns and how can they best meet them? What back-up materials will be required to persuade them (for example, learners' portfolios, learners' books)?

2.1.2 Design and use of promotional materials

2.1.2.1 Departmental brochures

According to Brooks *et al* (1993: 7-8) and Reynolds *et al* (2004: 12), much of the argument for teaching and studying history can best be conveyed in attractively designed departmental brochures. Such brochures have several advantages: they show a history department to be forward-thinking and concerned about its learners and their varied interests; offer learners the opportunity to play a part in design and content, thus providing valuable consumer perspectives; enable the department to include particularly attractive features, such as photographs of learners engaged in fieldwork or involved in other historical activities; provide information

in advance of meetings with interested parties, hence providing a basis for discussion and elucidation at meetings, so that these appear less like lectures conveying information and more like collaborative discussions.

Many of the advantages of using brochures can be achieved only if two types are produced: general and specialist. General brochures, conveying basic information and general arguments, can include a statement of the learning experiences which history offers, with special reference to vocational skills in order to impart the idea that history and vocationalism are not antithetical; descriptions of the particular areas of study and of the interests and teaching strategies of the staff; photographs highlighting special features which show learners at work; examples of learners' results; evidence of other departmental activities and involvements, and cross-references to the specialist brochures (Brooks *et al* 1993: 8, Everdell 2005: 19). Specialist brochures, targeted at particular groups, such as parents, school principals, governing bodies, local employers, and, of course, potential learners, could elaborate on particular features for these consumer groups, and may contain more diagrammatic and other illustrative material to do this. The increased cost of including numerous photographs and other illustrations in the specialist brochures may be offset in part by the fact that fewer brochures of this type are required (Everdell 2005: 18, Stearns 2005: 23-4, Trainee History Teachers 1999: 14-5).

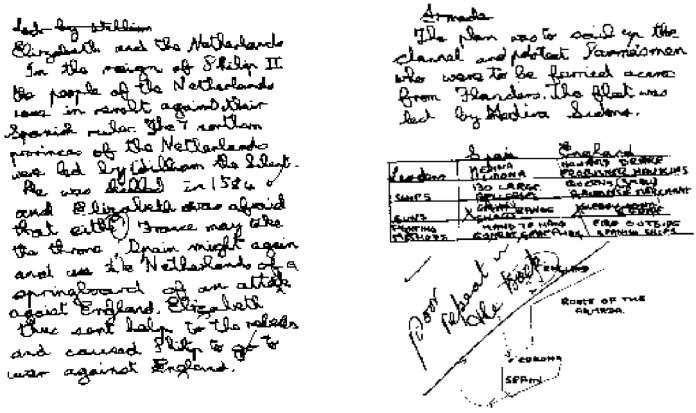
2.1.2.2 Presentation materials to overcome misconceptions

One of the problems confronting a history educator trying to present effective arguments for maintaining or expanding the teaching of history in government schools is the way in which many people perceive the subject (Asmal 2001: 18). According to Wilson (1991: 138), those educated prior to the 1980s may well believe that history has little to contribute to education in the twenty-first century because they believe it still to be predominantly concerned with the copying down of dictated notes and with rote learning. As such people may be school principals and government officials it may be best to preface specific arguments with a brief exposition of modern developments in the teaching of history. This can be done with one of the most attractive pieces of evidence at the history educator's disposal — learners' work. A contrast can be made between the kind of work which learners undertook in the 1970s

and what they will undertake today. This may be introduced by some initial reference to earlier ideas about history teaching (Dept of Education 2000: 16-7). According to scholars such as Brooks *et al* (1993: 13) and Dickinson *et al* (1984: 35-6), the presentation could be structured as follows:

- History teaching in the 1970s

The first set of presentation materials could be an analysis of a typical 35-minute lesson in terms of learner activity using "Dictated notes A and B" (Figure 1).



Source: Brooks *et al* 1993:13

The educator can explain to the "audience" that in "Dictated note A" the learner tried to write down what the educator dictated, and the "audience" can be asked to note the emphasis on fact and the effect of the speed of dictation on the quality of the English and the spelling. In "Dictated note B" the learner tried to break the monotony of the dictated note by copying a table and map from the chalkboard, but even then did not always understand their meaning. The homework for the above lesson would be learning the material for a one-word-answer test in the following lesson. Some of the issues that can be considered for discussion with the "audience" are: How far do the lesson activities bear out the learners' view of history teaching? Was this lesson, with its restricted activities, typical of their experience? (Brooks *et al* 1993: 13, Steele 1983: 1-7).

- Changes in the study of history since the 1980s

The second set of presentation materials could be an example of the history educator's own learners' work, showing how considerably the aims, objectives and/or outcomes of history have changed since the 1970s. Before the educator moves on to the second presentation, it would be worthwhile to emphasise the professional integrity of history educators. The broadening of aims, objectives and/or outcomes has not been a sudden panic reaction to the market forces of the twenty-first century but, rather, part of a professional reassessment which has been in progress since at least the late 1960s. These changes in history teaching are generally known as "The New History". In the 1960s history educators were worried about the survival of their subject in schools. A twin threat arose from the emergence of integrated studies and the new social sciences, spearheaded by sociology. It was feared that history would be seen as a subject irrelevant to the curriculum, and be confined to the timetable junk-room along with subjects such as school guidance, counselling and Biblical instruction (Steele 1983: 94-105).

Defenders of history as a subject in schools needed a sharper analytical weapon than had previously existed and in 1971 J B Coltham and J Fines provided it with their pamphlet *Educational objectives for the study of history*. Although the Coltham & Fines pamphlet has come under attack, it made history teachers consider in detail the aims, objectives and/or outcomes of history courses and the skills they develop. According to Nichol (1984: 9-10), Coltham & Fines argued that it was possible to analyse the nature of historical study as a separate discipline, and then to categorise the skills needed to engage in the discipline. Such skills could be arranged in an order of progression which learners could master. By exercising his/her skills upon historical evidence the learner would be involved in the historical process. Such work would relate closely to the imaginative reconstruction of past historical situations. The skills and abilities which Coltham & Fines (1971: 16-21) identified as being involved in the study of history are: vocabulary acquisition, reference skills, memorisation, comprehension, translation, analysis, extrapolation, synthesis, judgement and evaluation, and communication skills.

- Outcomes-based history teaching in the Further Education and Training phase in 2006 and beyond

The third set of presentation materials could be examples of activities taken from outcomes-based history teaching. An outcomes-based approach to history teaching is currently to be followed in government schools and many changes will have to be made in the history classroom as the new approach is characterised by a competence-based, interactive and learner-centred methodology (SASHT 2002: 4-5). Classroom examples of individual and group outcomes-based history teaching activities follow. Learners individually complete the following activity in their workbooks: The knowledge focus area is "Causes and consequences of slavery — captured!". Imagine that you are a slave, and that you have regained your freedom. Write a diary entry on your experiences. You could include: How were you caught? What was it like on the boat? What was it like to be a slave? How does Africa differ from the Americas? What was it like to return home? How have you changed? If your name was changed, will you change it back again? How do you view slavery now? (Buthelezi *et al* 2003: 74).

The facilitator then divides learners into small groups. Each group completes the following activity: The knowledge focus area is "Slavery in South Africa — report on slavery!" Suppose it is the year 1800. You are part of a group of journalists researching slavery in South Africa. You believe that slavery is an inhuman practice. But many people rely on their slaves as labour for their farms. In fact, most Europeans think that slavery does not affect them. Use the information provided in your textbook, and any other information you can find, to write a report on slavery in South Africa. In your report, pay attention to what slavery is; its causes; its results; what can be done to stop it. The newspaper editor has given you certain guidelines. The report must fill a double page in the newspaper, have an interesting headline, include the names of the journalists, be easy to understand, and include tables and diagrams where necessary. As a group, draw up an assessment sheet that you can use to assess your newspaper report. Use the guidelines provided by the editor as criteria. Also use any other criteria you think you need. Once you have completed your assessment sheet, assess your newspaper report. How can you improve on your report? (Buthelezi *et al* 2003: 79-80).

2.2 Presenting a continuing and convincing case for history to young people

It would be a pity if schools turned learners away from the subject when there is such a wealth of interest in it outside the schools, as reflected for example, in the popularity of the television programmes shown on "The History Channel". According to Verner (2004: 6), the answer is to bring the history classroom to life and make it interesting by using the drama and tensions of the subject as well as the history educator's own enthusiasm for the subject. This section thus offers guidance to history educators on how to develop innovative and interesting activities for teaching learners in social sciences and eventually in FET History.

2.2.1 Inside the history classroom

There will always be a need for traditional teaching methods in the history classroom (chalk and talk, dictating notes, putting notes on the board or overhead projector for the learners to copy). Traditional teaching methods can be highly useful in imparting historical information. After all, it is important for learners to develop a base of historical knowledge; there are facts worth knowing. But this should not be the sole, or even the main method used in the teaching of history. Knowing historical facts is not necessarily the same thing as understanding historical developments. The traditional teaching methods cannot on their own lead to the development of the analytical thinking skills required for true understanding (Bam & Visser 2002: 95). For this, the so-called new teaching and learning methods, informed by current thinking on learning such as Gardner and Hatch's multiple intelligence theory (cf section 2.2.1.1) and Kolb and Fry's experiential learning theory (cf section 2.2.1.2), are useful and essential. The challenge to history practitioners is to translate these new models of learning into the arena of history teaching in order to make learning in the history classroom more interesting, interactive, imaginative and challenging. Frederick (1993: 2) clearly elucidates this task:

> The highest challenge we face as classroom teachers is to motivate our pupils to love History as we do, and to be joyously involved with the texts, themes, issues, and questions that interest and excite us. Although our pupils may seem less well motivated or prepared these days, ultimately the responsibility for their motivation rests with us.

An elaboration of the new models of learning and their implementation in the history classroom will now be given.

2.2.1.1 Gardner and Hatch's theory of multiple intelligences: a draw-a-concept activity

Gardner & Hatch (1989: 4-7) theorised that there are autonomous human intelligences. Their definition of the concept of intelligence was therefore applied to seven different forms of thinking. They also recognised cultural values as an important element in human intelligence. The seven intelligences of Gardner and Hatch's theory are: logico-mathematical (core components: logical or numerical patterns and long chains of reasoning); linguistic (core components: sounds, rhythms, meanings of words, different functions of language); musical (core components: rhythms, pitch, timbre, forms of musical expression); spatial (core components: visual-spatial relationships, transformation of perceptions); bodily-kinaesthetic (core components: control of body movements, object manipulation); interpersonal (core components: moods, temperament, motivations, desires of others), and intrapersonal (core components: own feelings, strengths, weaknesses, desires, intelligences). According to Gardner & Hatch (1989: 5), all people represent a blend of these intelligences.

Gardner and Hatch's theory of multiple intelligences provides history practitioners with an understanding of the variety of talents that learners may bring to the history classroom; talents that may, or may not be easily recognised in the context of traditional teaching and learning. With reference to Gardner and Hatch's theory of multiple intelligences, McCown *et al* (1996: 142) recommend that history practitioners ask themselves the following questions, among others: How can the theory of multiple intelligences influence the teaching of history in my classroom? How can multiple intelligences be used to teach abstract concepts such as revolution, imperialism, democracy and absolutism in my classroom?

A practical classroom example will illustrate the use of Gardner and Hatch's theory of multiple intelligences in history teaching. A draw-a-concept activity, where an idea is transposed into an image and multiple intelligences are used, is most suitable for teaching an abstract concept such as revolution to Grade 10 learners. As learners grow older, their understanding of the abstract in history improves. Concepts such as revolution are normally more easily understood by learners over the

age of 16 than by learners in the lower senior phase (Grades 7 to 9). The draw-a-concept activity could therefore precede the actual teaching of the concept of revolution as part of as the knowledge focus area of "Kingdoms, communities and trade: southern Africa" in order to ascertain learners' prior knowledge and preconceptions of it.

The facilitator introduces the activity and leads a preliminary big-group discussion on the concept of revolution and the main issues relating to it. Class members are then divided into groups of four and the resources (coloured marker pens, large sheets of paper and "Prestik") are distributed. In small groups, the learners visualise the concept of revolution and then represent it in graphic form. Learners should also devise a caption to go with their posters as a way of clarifying the image. The groups report on their ideas to the rest of the class, and another big-group discussion follows. This draw-a-concept activity can later also be used to promote discussion of a range of historical concepts: hunter-gatherers, nomadic, social structures, pastoral revolution, agro-pastoralists, trade, and so forth. Following the draw-a-concept activity, Grade 10 learners will be able to analyse an abstract historical concept; represent the concept in visual form; work in groups and share ideas; report back to the class on the conclusions reached, and reflect on the meaning and significance of the groups' pictorial representations. To complete this activity learners require to use multiple intelligences: the logico-mathematical, linguistic, spatial, interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligences (Buthelezi *et al* 2003: 13-5, Davies *et al* 2003: 44).

2.2.1.2 Kolb and Fry's theory of experiential learning: a convert-a-text activity

Kolb & Fry (1975: 52) created their model from four elements: concrete experience; observation and reflection; the formation of abstract concepts, and testing in new situations. They represented these four elements in their famous experiential learning circle and established that an experiential learning cycle can begin at any one of the four points but that it should really be approached as a continuous spiral. Kolb & Fry (1975: 35-6) argued that effective learning entails the possession of four different abilities: concrete experience abilities, reflective observation abilities, abstract conceptualisation abilities, and active experimentation abilities. Few learners can approach the "ideal" in this

respect; most tend, they suggested, to develop a strength in, or orientation to one of the poles of each dimension. As a result they developed a learning style inventory designed to place people on a line between concrete experience and abstract conceptualisation, and between reflective observation and active experimentation. Using this inventory, Kolb and Fry proceeded to identify four basic learning styles: converger (abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation); diverger (concrete experience and reflective observation); assimilator (abstract conceptualisation and reflective observation); and accommodator (concrete experience and active experimentation). In developing this model, Kolb & Fry (1975: 7) helped, along with Witkin & Goodenough (1980: 37), to challenge models of learning that seek to reduce potential to one dimension such as intelligence.

According to McCown *et al* (1996: 142) the theory of experiential learning can also be used in history teaching: after introducing a new concept or a difficult section, the history educator may give the learners a minute or two of silence to reflect, another minute or two to discuss, and then, finally, an activity or task to complete. A convert-a-text activity provides a practical example to illustrate the use of Kolb & Fry's experiential learning theory in the history classroom. It can be used as a means of encouraging younger learners to visualise, and therefore mentally comprehend a historical event when all they have to go on is the evidence of a written text. The activity can also be used with older learners as a way of making them think more deeply about abstract concepts or a certain idea from, or aspect of the past. As this kind of activity may not be taken seriously by learners over 16, the educator may need to sell it to these learners. Suppose the knowledge focus area is: "Migrations and movements: Shaka of the Amazulu". The learning outcomes of the activity may be to analyse and then discuss documentary evidence and, in so doing, explore a variety of important issues and themes; assess the meaning and significance of a text; analyse the relationship between a text and an image; imagine how the event would "look" in visual form; translate the written evidence into visual form by way of a painting, sketch or collage; compare and contrast the learners' visual interpretations of the event with other interpretations, and check for consistency.

The facilitator first explains the activity, and then reads out the following extract to the class:

> A British trader, Nathaniel Isaacs, wrote an account of his "travels and adventures" in South Africa in which he described the Zulu way of life at the time of Shaka. Here is an extract from his diaries:
>
> As Chaka [Shaka] advanced towards manhood, he gave evident symptoms of realising the opinions of the Zoolas [Zulus], that he was more than an earthly being. His strength appeared Herculean, his disposition turbulent, his heart iron, his mind a warring element, and his ambition knew no bounds ...
>
> The first act that marked his bloody reign, was his putting to death all the principal people of his brother's government — those who were suspected to be inimical to his becoming king, were also speared. He then, after the death of Tingiswaa [Dingisway], went to war with the Umtatwas, the tribe that had sheltered and protected him while in exile, and after destroying the major part, compelled the rest to join him. The Quarbees [AmaQuabe], another powerful tribe, were the next whom he annihilated. This African Mars ultimately depopulated the whole line of coast from the Amapoota River to the Ootogale.
>
> This ferocious despot had now arrived at the zenith of his pride and ambition; and having, for the present, sated himself with the blood of the neighbouring tribes, he directed his thoughts towards his own government. This was imperative, as from his numerous victories, he felt himself at the head of an evergrowing and gigantic nation ...
>
> He was a monster, a compound of vice and ferocity, without one virtue to redeem his name from that infamy to which history will consign it: I must, however, by way of conclusion, state that if Chaka ever had one redeeming quality, it was this, that the European strangers at Natal received his protection, and were shielded by him against the imposition of his chiefs (Buthelezi *et al* 2003: 213).

Prior to the reading of the extract, learners are instructed to focus on its content, forming a mental picture of it as they do so (concrete experience abilities). In tandem with the class, the facilitator establishes the "facts" as contained in the extract and distributes the resources required for the activity (a copy of the extract, art materials and paper). Learners are given time to reflect (reflective observation abilities) and discuss the facts (abstract conceptualisation abilities). They must then individually produce a visual representation of the events described in the extract (active experimentation abilities). The facilitator then discusses the images produced with the class, assessing similarities and differences between them and, if possible, displaying actual pictures of the events. Finally, the television drama "Shaka Zulu" can be shown. Learners are then instructed to write a critical film review based on their factual knowledge of the events. The idea would be to evaluate the strengths

and weaknesses of the film from a historical standpoint (Davies *et al* 2003: 22).

2.2.2 Outside the history classroom: a field trip to the Sterkfontein Caves

South African history can be made considerably more interesting by taking learners out of the formal classroom environment. In South Africa we are not really spoilt for choice, but museums that can cater for large numbers and that deal with South African history themes do exist in most cities. Two types of field trip are possible, namely excursions and historical tours. This article will confine itself to the former. Excursions constitute a morning or a day away from the school environment. Two types of excursions or day trips may be undertaken: a visit to a museum or historical site (it may be possible to combine two or three into one visit), or a visit to a temporary exhibition being hosted by a local institution (a gallery, university, etc). Careful planning is essential. What follows is a guide to planning and conducting a day trip for Grade 10 learners to an archaeological site, the Sterkfontein Caves near Krugersdorp in Gauteng. The learning unit "The importance of archaeological evidence" may be approached by visiting the Sterkfontein Caves where learners can see an archaeological site and realise the importance of archaeological evidence in their study of history.

As far as the arrangements are concerned, the history educator should bear certain things in mind prior to the visit and on the day itself. The class should not be so large as to overwhelm the site. Any activity that takes learners out of school requires a certain amount of official and internal paperwork. The history facilitator should inform the Department of Education, using the applicable document, and obtain clearance; inform his/her headmaster/headmistress; have learners complete indemnity forms; book a slot with the site; book transport; visit the site in advance (if possible), and plan in detail how the excursion will function, including what activities will take place: completing a worksheet, listening to a talk, having a tea break, watching a video, doing a "hands-on" activity, and so forth. The learners should be briefed beforehand on what is expected of them, in terms of both behaviour and anything that they are required to bring along (pens, pencils, lunch packs, money, etc). It is a good idea to commit all of this, as well as details of the date, time, and so on, to paper.

The learners should get to the Sterkfontein Caves as early as possible so as to be fresh for the day's activities. At the site, the facilitator should divide the learners into groups of five and provide each group with a map of the site to assist them in finding their way around. A worksheet such as the following should be distributed to all the learners:

> Worksheet on field trip: The Cradle of Humankind at Sterkfontein Caves
>
> Read, discuss and complete the following questions in your groups. You will, however, have to submit your own answers to the above questions on return to the school.
>
> Define the concepts: archaeological evidence, archaeologist, artefacts, Cradle of Civilisation, World Heritage site.
>
> Why do you think the fossil sites at the Sterkfontein Caves are such an important part of South Africa's history and heritage?
>
> Look at the picture of the site. From the evidence work out: what *Australopithecus* and the *Homo hominids* ate; what tools they used; what they used to make a fire; what their clothes were made of; where they lived.
>
> Your name: .....
>
> Your class: .....
>
> Your group number: .....

Learners must complete the worksheet by means of the delta technique. This technique entails joint activity of all the members of the group but with each member working on his/her own worksheet. Ideas and knowledge are shared by the group but the final product is an individual effort (Schoeman 2005: 5). The facilitator should assure the learners that the exercise will count towards their final assessment of the year. The completed worksheet will be assessed and put in their portfolios (Buthelezi *et al* 2003: 1-12, Ilsley 2004: 21-3).

3. Conclusion and recommendations

History educators should be as careful and professional in the presentation of the case for history as they are in their curricular activities. This may mean using the range of presentational skills which form part of their effective classroom teaching. In particular, promotional materials may need to be prepared for specifically targeted groups, including parents, school principals, governing bodies, government officials and employers. It is also important to be able to present a continuing and convincing case to

young people. History learners who appear confused about why they are studying the subject do little to encourage others to choose it as a subject in the Further Education and Training phase (Grades 10 to 12). Convinced learners make good ambassadors, whom even governing bodies (often including their parents) cannot ignore. Ultimately, it will be extremely difficult for history educators to be and remain effective if the subject is marginalised in the curriculum and learner numbers dwindle. The effective teaching of history requires a healthy environment in which to flourish. A marginalised position on the timetable with dwindling numbers of learners will not provide such an environment (Brooks *et al* 1993: 21-3). Against the above backdrop this article offers the following recommendations:

- An invigorating new history initiative

The South African History Project, launched in 2001 following the Report of the History/Archaeology Panel in 2000, ushers in a new era for history as a school subject in South African government schools. As an invigorating new history initiative of the Department of Education its central thrust is to promote and enhance the conditions for and status of the learning and teaching of history in South African government schools, with the goal of restoring its material position and intellectual purchase in the classroom. According to the Department of Education (2000: 18) the objectives of the new initiative are, among others, to create forums which discuss the nature of history and history teaching in schools and devise strategies on how it can be improved and strengthened; to undertake studies and initiate activities that will strengthen history teaching, and to initiate activities that will resurrect interest in the study of history on the part of young people. Few subjects can have greater salience than history studies since history transmits qualities such as an informed sense of the past, a critical understanding of the world we inhabit, a receptiveness to voices other than our own, and a knowledge of both who we are and why we are the people we have become (Dept of Education 2000: 6-7).

- The importance of historical consciousness

The formal study of history assists in the formation of a conscious historical consciousness, which has an essential role to play in building the dignity of human values in the context of an informed awareness of the legacy and meaning of the past. Promoting the study of the past

is a particular educational imperative in a country like South Africa which is itself consciously remaking its current history. In conditions of flux, historical study of a probing kind is a vital aid against amnesia and a warning against any triumphalism of the present. A knowledge of the past is also crucial to an understanding of the present. Unless one knows something of the past, one has no informed criteria by which to assess and to judge the present. In other words, contemporary problems and complexities, like the workings of race, class and gender, have to be seen within the context of their development over time. It is a major irony that we are having to address a crisis in history, when the pressing importance of history continues to be demonstrated daily in South Africa. We live in a society in which contemporary issues are continually understood and judged within the powerful context of a past which has bequeathed us a legacy of colonialism and apartheid. It is in this spirit that we have to recognise the fact that everyone has a form of historical consciousness. This consciousness is not inscribed onto a blank slate by educators in schools. It is created in and by the family, the community, churches, the media and other areas of communication which interact with individual experience. The formal study of history can develop this latent consciousness into a conscious one. If the present situation is one in which the formal study of history continues to be either ignored or neglected, there is a real danger of robbing future generations of a sense of how they have come to be what they are (Dept of Education 2000: 8).

- History has a practical dimension

According to Bam & Visser (2002: 5-6), history is not, as some seem to believe, a subject lacking a practical dimension. It is not, especially in South Africa today, just one subject among others. Nor is it something that can be left to university academics, less academically promising learners and a few people of an antiquarian disposition. It is of vital importance to the whole of South African society. History has developed into a multi-skilled discipline which has immense relevance to the general and vocational education of learners. Many different educational and life skills can be gained through learning history.

- The identification of bias

By studying different types of oral and written material, such as official accounts, diary entries, newspaper editorials, eye-witness accounts,

cartoons, and so on, learners learn to identify the underlying positions and perspectives. They note, for instance, who created the material and for what purpose. Learners learn that what they read or hear is not purely neutral, not just a statement of some final truth. They learn to look out for emotive language, preference for one point of view, omission of other positions, unsubstantiated generalisations, and so on. This ability to recognise different perspectives is crucial in a world where we are bombarded with information. All South African citizens need to be able to make informed, independent judgements about newspaper editorials, television news accounts, persuasion in advertisements, political speeches, and so on.

- Empathy

By learning how to place themselves in the shoes of people of the past, history learners are enabled to consider what an experience was like from different people's points of view. With the amount of conflict present in modern societies, the ability to understand how events or circumstances feel to other people is vitally important. Once learners of history have mastered the skill within the context of the past, they are equipped to apply it in the world around them.

- Literacy skills

History is the ideal subject in which to develop literacy skills — a necessity in today's world. Not only do learners learn comprehension skills, but history trains them to look for contradictions or inconsistencies in an argument. They can distinguish between statements of fact and broader interpretations, and compare different positions and work out which ones seem more plausible. Moreover, they learn to be flexible since their own preconceived ideas need to be modified when they find evidence that proves their position to be limited in some way.

- Critical thinking skills

Critical thinking skills are what learners need in order to work through, articulate and argue in support of their own positions on matters that concern them. These skills enable people to function creatively and positively in their jobs, as well as in their labour unions, professional organisations.

These educational and life skills are not only important for the individual — of use in any future job or other activity in life — they

are essential skills if learners are to participate actively and capably as citizens in a democratic South Africa. For without the social awareness and analytical skills which learners can develop through the study of history, they will forever remain susceptible to propaganda and political manipulation. Equipping today's learners to become active, critical citizens is essential to the task of nation-building (Bam & Visser 2002: 6).

This discussion is by no means an exhaustive account of this theme. Issues which deserve further attention include strategies to raise history's standing in South African government schools and ways to expand history's humanising role in the culture of South African society at large.

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