

RACE AND ETHNICITY IN THE TEACHING OF HISTORY: CHALLENGES TO HISTORY EDUCATORS IN THE NEW DISPENSATION*

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1. INTRODUCTION

A frequent complaint of those familiar with the teaching of history in high schools is that the subject is too often taught as content and not often as process. Teaching history mainly as content seems to be abetted by the popular notion that 'history' is a body of information recorded in the past and brought into the present. This approach makes history to be vulnerable of teaching it with influences of race and ethnicity, whether consciously or unconsciously. Such influences ignore the process by which history is to be interpreted. The influence of race and ethnicity in the teaching of history fails to recognize the process that takes place between the historian and that part of the past that remains, namely, the documents, relics, and other sources of information that the historian must interpret. Knowledge of interpretation of a certain period of history allows educators to generate classroom lessons in both inductive reasoning and critical thinking.

This article is mainly intended for South African history educators, university lecturers, trainee educators and those involved in history method teaching as they face the challenges of a society undergoing dramatic transformation. It is the author's belief that the history classroom is the place where the initial burden of shaping transformation emerges and that history educators have a key role to play in enabling the new South Africa to come with terms with its past in a positive and appropriate way. The author begins by asserting that the history classroom is where questions about why people thought and acted as they did are most likely to arise.

* This article is an expanded version of a paper read at the South African Society for History Teaching (SASHT) Conference, Rand Afrikaans University (RAU), Johannesburg, 5 September 2003. The original paper was entitled **Teaching history beyond the categories of race and ethnicity: Echoes of the past**. Please note that the author experienced several of the arguments mentioned in the text and, consequently, writes from first-hand experience which explains why documentary proof is sometimes not supplied in the footnotes.

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The author maintains that because history educators have to deal with the South African past which is filled with divisions and conflicts, they are faced with the problem of how to avoid perpetuating this in the teaching of the subject, and whether it is possible to teach history without the influences of race and ethnicity. Even today, some history educators find themselves confronted with a problem of how to approach potentially explosive topics such as apartheid in racially mixed classrooms. The article addresses the problem of how history was taught in schools during the apartheid era and suggests recommendations which could be helpful in the teaching of the subject in post-apartheid South Africa. It highlights the impact of race and ethnicity in the teaching of history after 1994. The author is conscious of the fact that there were developments implemented by the National Education Minister after 2003 to address some problems pertaining to the status of history teaching. The author is aware that the National Curriculum Statement was issued in an attempt to restructure the role of history as a school subject. It is, however, not the author's intention to elaborate on the post-2003 period in this article.

2. THE DILEMMA OF HISTORY TEACHING IN A DEMOCRATIC SOUTH AFRICA

Generally, the teaching of history in South Africa has still to absorb and reflect upon the remarkable impact of teaching methodology and cultural backgrounds which influenced the educators of this subject in the past decades. While South African historians have extended the field and the range of historical inquiry about the teaching of history, little is said about the influences of race and ethnicity in the teaching of the subject. They still tend to avoid the emerging critique of the methodological input in the teaching of the subject and concentrate on the subject matter. This article argues that there should be a link between what is taught and how it is taught. The purpose of the article is therefore to consider the significance and impact of consciously and unconsciously teaching history with some influences of race and ethnic connotations. Some of the changes which educators should adopt in order to improve the dynamic teaching of history are also discussed.

There are many dilemmas facing both black and white history educators in the teaching of South African history. Differing interpretations and influences of race and ethnicity begin early in school and fester for long, creating and breeding hatred amongst the learners. It is therefore imperative for history educators to be objective in their teaching and to say what their readers and learners may not want to hear. To avoid tendencies of racial and ethnic influences, both historians and history

educators have to strive to present the historical facts despite the weaknesses of the historian himself and the nature of the sources available.²

History, as a subject in the schools, has been under scrutiny. Many people, and young people in particular, claim that history is out of touch with the technological age in which they live. Furthermore, there are those who also believe that history as a subject is too difficult a discipline to teach to young learners. They argue that it requires mature judgment, careful balancing of facts and meticulous attention to detail. Another argument is that history should not be taught in schools because of the controversial nature of some themes. It is furthermore even possible to teach and interpret history in such a way that it suits, and even justifies and bolsters present-day political aims, systems and ideologies. There are also intellectual trends which seek to devalue history as a subject in its own right. One of these trends is the increasing popularity of integrated studies which was promoted after 1994.

3. THE CONCEPT OF 'RACE AND ETHNICITY' IN HISTORY TEACHING

Racism and ethnicity are exceptionally complex concepts. They are more than the convictions used by individuals or groups to justify discrimination against others. They are not things outside individuals or groups, but an internalized frame of reference which directs the opinion of the individuals or groups about others. In historical terms, these concepts have a direct influence on the educators' actions and behaviour in their teaching of the subject matter. Ethnic groups in South Africa are not natural phenomena but they are social and historical constructs. Whatever 'reality' they may be said to have derives from the efforts of those who believe in them and act as if they are real. This becomes clearly visible when one studies the history of South Africa.

If history is not properly taught, three levels of racism may be identified: individual, institutional and cultural. Individual racism is the personal view that members of one racial group are inferior in comparison to members of another racial group on the basis of physical differences. Institutional racism comes into existence through laws, conventions and practices which reflect or result in racial inequality. Cultural racism refers to the view that members of another group have a lesser culture or no culture at all.³

² U Dhupelia-Mesthrie, "A blast from the past": The teaching of South African history at an apartheid university, 1960s-1980s", *South African Historical Journal*, Vol. 42, May, 2000, p. 54.

³ C de Wet, "Racial violence in South African schools: a media analysis", *Acta Academica*, Vol. 34, No. 3, 2002, pp. 129-53.

4. TENDENCIES OF TEACHING HISTORY UNDER THE ARMPITS OF RACE AND ETHNICITY

4.1 Problems of the curriculum content

Presently, many history educators silently wrestle with the following questions: How should history be taught beyond the categories of race and ethnicity? Have schools raised above this challenge of teaching history beyond the categories of race and ethnicity? Can the problems experienced in the teaching of history be attributed to the teaching methods or to the structure of the subject material? Should the weight of history teaching lean towards structure and context or towards human agency and action? Academic and scientific research in the teaching of history has not effectively dealt with the above-mentioned questions. In the past many historians and researchers for some time occupied themselves with what the meaning of history enfolds and left the methodological aspects of its presentation to the pedagogues. This scenario created a rift between how the subject matter is presented and what the content entails.⁴

Departing from Kader Asmal, the former Minister of Education's statement that "(t)oo much history teaching today follows the pattern of the past: rote learning, a lack of imagination, a lack of excitement and, ultimately, a lack of interest among learners is the order of the day. What we are looking for is history as a debate and contested judgment rather than as prescription",⁵ it is important to realize that the end of apartheid has seen the beginning of a new history that has prompted a painful reassessment of how history teaching has perpetuated racial and ethnic stereotypes. The more positive assumption in this regard is that good history teaching is based on what history educators do, namely, investigate a spectrum of voices, verify arguments, stimulate debates, and communicate ideas.

Judged broadly, the present history curriculum does not effectively help to explain the formation of the present. In South African history, under the revised core syllabus of 1996, there has naturally been a broadening of the overarching narrative to move beyond 'white' history. Thus, attention is paid to a record of the liberation struggle and of the role of leading political and cultural figures in the making of a post-apartheid country. The central thesis of this article is that the challenges and problems educators experience in their teaching are not simply micro-level linguistic difficulties; they also reflect conceptual and pedagogical obstacles to effective teaching in this discipline. The answer, from a teaching point of view, is to engage

⁴ **Die Burger**, 31 October 2001.

⁵ **Remarks by the Minister of Education**, pp. 1-13.

in curriculum development which explicitly aims to equip learners in the study of history.

RG Allen from the Rand Afrikaans University argued that over the decades prior to 1990, history content was determined by the apartheid government structures of curriculum development. Historians began tacitly accepting that earlier 'establishment' representation of the past were Eurocentric and Afrikaner-nationalistic in nature and were basically deployed for narrow political ends. According to Allen, the truth of this judgment was acknowledged by at least some erstwhile Afrikaner-Nationalist historians, including the late FA van Jaarsveld. Allen argued that Van Jaarsveld on several occasions publicly admitted and apologized for the fact that a great deal of Afrikaner-Nationalist history, including his works, had misrepresented the past to provide socially and personally 'useful' history.⁶

The above assertion was also endorsed by J Bam and P Visser in their book, **A new history for a new South Africa**, by indicating that as early as the late nineteenth century, Gustav Preller (known as the father of the 'volksgeskiedenis' tradition) popularized events such as 'The Great Trek', the establishment of the Boer Republics, and the Battle of Blood River. Preller's tradition was followed in later years by Afrikaner-Nationalist historians such as FA van Jaarsveld and CFJ Muller. Their version of history was based on an interpretation of the Afrikaners as an 'uitverkore volk' or 'chosen people', a notion which they derived from the Old Testament. Afrikaner-Nationalist historians deliberately set about creating a distinct Afrikaner history and culture by focusing on Afrikaner heroes. When the Nationalist Party gained power in 1948, this historical perspective was to become entrenched in the school system.⁷

In the past history was viewed as a vehicle which to a certain extent legitimized ideologies of apartheid, which many Afrikaans speakers perceived as an important cornerstone of their nation's future. It was common cause that the official history

⁶ GR Allen, "Is there a baby in this bathwater? Disquieting thoughts on the value of content in history", **South African Historical Journal**, Vol. 42, May, 2000, pp. 290-1. See also FA van Jaarsveld, "Skoolgeskiedenis in die nuwe Suid-Afrika", **Gister en Vandag/Yesterday and Today**, Vol. 20, September, 1990, p. 1. See also J Dean and R Sieborger, "After apartheid: The outlook for history", **Teaching History**, Vol. 79, April, 1995, pp. 32-8. See also M Walker, "History and history teaching in Apartheid South Africa", **Radical History Review**, No. 46/47, January, 1990, p. 304. See also G Cuthbertson and A Grundlingh, "Some problematic issues in the restructuring of history education in South Africa", **South African Historical Journal**, Vol. 26, May, 1992, pp. 155-6.

⁷ J Bam and P Visser, **A new history for a new South Africa**, p. 15. They identified the following trends in the history textbooks: almost exclusive focus was put on the history of whites in South Africa; Africans were portrayed as exclusively 'tribal'; Africans were portrayed as inferior to whites; African history was only included as 'background' history; school history served to justify apartheid policies; history syllabuses did not reflect history as a 'social process' and the dynamics of race, gender and class were totally ignored.

curriculum during the apartheid era presented a flawed, partial, racial, ethnic, gendered and culturally biased picture of the past that failed to promote unity and togetherness of all South Africans despite racial categories. Then it became difficult to apportion blame to history educators who adopted the path of this history teaching as it was prescribed by the then Nationalist Party's Education Ministries as well as the successive ministries. The dominant notion in the teaching of South African history was that Europeans played the central role as agents of change and development. Others were included only when whites came into contact with them.

History dealing with apartheid posed great difficulties for both history educators and learners. Without doubt, teaching and learning about apartheid is difficult for educators and learners of all races if they are to come to terms with it because it shocks and embarrasses learners. In most cases learners fail to comprehend the real impact of apartheid on the black population. For example, in most cases teaching topics on the legalization of apartheid in 1948 evokes bitter emotions, particularly from the black learners who are at the same time eager to know the impact apartheid policy had on the black population. The opposite could be said about the white learners who are mostly embarrassed by the impact of apartheid. Depending on how these topics are presented to the learners, such impacts of racial influences may enlarge the pre-1994 racial rift in the South African population.⁸ To bypass such influences in teaching about apartheid, educators should therefore try and explain the motives behind the implementation of apartheid and also show how both black and white people reacted to it. J Bam suggested that history should be used as a tool in giving voice to the voiceless and tongues to the displaced, providing a space for ordinary people to shape the rewriting of South Africa's most painful past.⁹

In her report about the 'Future of the Past' Conference, C Hamilton of the Witwatersrand University strongly noted and expressed complexities about the production of history which ultimately influence how it is taught. She noted that Africanist sentiments were voiced by sectors of the audience and the concentration of history for long in the white hands was also challenged. White historians and history educators were called on to bring greater self-consciousness to bear on the ways in which they engage in history production and accused of influencing history writing with racial sentiments.¹⁰

⁸ Personal collection. Interview with Ms M Makgasane, history educator at Lereko High School, Bloemfontein, 9 September 2003.

⁹ J Bam, "Negotiating history, truth and reconciliation and globalization: An analysis of the suppression of historical consciousness in South African schools as a case study", **Revised paper delivered at the South African Historical Society Conference**, July, 1999, Cape Town, pp. 1-13.

¹⁰ C Hamilton, "The future of the past: New trajectories", **South African Historical Journal**, Vol. 35, November, 1996, pp. 147-8. See also L Waldman, "The past: Who owns it and what should we do about it?" **South African Historical Journal**, Vol. 35, November, 1996, pp. 149-54. See

One other striking element coupled with the problem of curriculum content in the teaching of history is the educators' beliefs, attitudes and values. These factors determine the messages educators convey in their teaching and influence the selection and emphasis of materials and concepts. Not only what the educator believed in contributed to this state of affairs in the teaching of history, but what was also significant was the character of the curriculum. Taking the passing of the apartheid legislation by DF Malan after 1948 as an example, it depends upon individual educators as to the presentation of this section of the learning material. In most cases the white history educators portray Malan as a hero. This myopic vision of the facts could be attributed to the kind of limited training the white educators themselves received on the teaching of history and their position in the segregated society contributed to this predicament. Therefore, if this part of the learning material is not properly taught and not presented in the correct context, racial and ethnic influences could be transmitted in a history classroom. For an educator to execute his duties effectively, deep historical understanding of the content, the nature of the society and the community taught is important. One of the best approaches for this is to teach through local and oral history. Barriers of ignorance and prejudice that, inevitably, exist between people can only be broken down if learners are able to listen to one another's stories, to understand each other's perspectives and traditions and respect one another's identities.

The fact that the study of history is not empirical in nature and that learners cannot physically visit the past, sometimes causes influences of race and ethnicity to become evident when the subject matter is presented. In order to understand the past, both learners and educators are reliant on what survives from the past, namely, the first record or primary sources. It is therefore that when interpretation is made in the secondary sources, influences of race and ethnicity come in. If history has been, or is, abused by the educators, perhaps with facts of racial and ethnic interpretation, they must, as in the past, again silently be forced to experience history from a broader angle. That implies not just by remembering the wrongs, but also by trying to give impetus to the social role of history in gaining a multi or cultural diverse perspective. The greatest problem is simply that South Africa has a history of great conflict, and today's learners come from the various sectors of our society that were placed differently by apartheid. They therefore see the conflict from quite different positions, for example, one person's Great Trek is another's land seizure; one person's defence of ancestral territory is another's heinous

also DW Cohen, "Silences of the living, orations of the dead: Further thoughts on the production of history", **paper presented at the Future of the Past Conference**, Cape Town, July, 1996, pp. 1-14.

massacre; and one person's mass action in pursuit of freedom is another's unruly mob intent on mayhem.

Sipho Seepe, former Deputy Vice-Chancellor of Vista University, stated that it was important for history status in schools to be clarified. He further indicated that for long South Africa's historians claimed that the black South African struggle was a struggle against apartheid, and this simplification and deliberate distortion of history erases the major struggles waged against colonialism that the Africans had engaged in before 1948.¹¹

In the new South Africa, the recovery of history, especially by means of personal testimony, is extremely important. The most obvious indication of this was the idea of the Government of National Unity (GNU) convening a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) to investigate human rights abuses during the apartheid years but the need for historical recovery went deeper. Through this South Africa forged a new inclusive historical identity from multiple histories of its people. The task is daunting, not only because of the diversity of the population, but also because its histories were so systematically suppressed and distorted by the apartheid regime.

4.2 The quality of history learning support materials (LSM)

The relationship between textbooks and the school history curriculum has been the focus of attention in South Africa. The announcement by the former Minister of Education, Prof S Bhengu, in August 1994 that interim syllabi would be drawn up without necessitating the purchase of new textbooks, provoked an incredulous reaction from the history teaching profession. It was difficult to comprehend how there could be meaningful changes to the syllabi without different textbooks, particularly new ones.¹² Textbooks are important in the teaching of history to supplement the knowledge of both educators and learners without regarding them as the only source of information. Textbooks also serve as guidelines as to what should be taught, therefore, the usage of textbooks cannot be disregarded.

Without any doubt, the teaching of history needs to be accompanied by having good quality history textbooks. A question repeatedly asked about the history textbooks is: What new history textbooks should be like if one is to bypass the influence of race and ethnicity in the teaching of this discipline? RF Sieborger

¹¹ S Seepe, "Challenges of our times: Can the miracle/hoax be sustained?" **Paper delivered at the graduation ceremony**, Vista University, Welkom Campus, April, 1998, pp. 1-15.

¹² R Sieborger and J Reid, "Textbooks and the School History Curriculum", **South African Historical Journal**, Vol. 33, November, 1995, pp. 169-77.

argued that historians and history writers should conceptualize textbooks in terms of the version or versions of the past which they conveyed. He proposed 'multi-perspectivity' as the most suitable approach as it would ensure that more than one version would be contained in a textbook.¹³ However, even today, innovative approaches are less persistent than rote learning in the teaching of history. Some history educators still continue to teach from the old apartheid era textbooks. Educators themselves describe the emergence of the 'so-called' new textbooks as just a 'cut and paste' kind of textbook.¹⁴

One of the more idiosyncratic features of teaching history at present is that educators are using both new textbooks and old so-called apartheid works because education departments plead that they are unable to afford the replacement cost of new books. In a few high schools in Bloemfontein and the surrounding areas, for the past decade educators were found to be using both kinds of material. This proved to be fruitful for some schools where history educators managed to reinterpret apartheid era textbook approaches. In some schools this seemed to be disastrous as educators continuously used the apartheid era textbooks. Some educators in these schools reported the emergence of textbooks which present themselves as new on the sneaky basis of having a picture of Nelson Mandela on the cover, but which continue to uphold old myths.¹⁵

Another barrier to the new history is the existence of a body of historical myth which has too often been reinforced by the textbooks, as well as by popular books, novels, films, and television series. Over the past years, a considerable amount of research has systematically disproved many of the myths which are still included in textbooks and are still being taught in history classes today.¹⁶

History educators must try to attain critical history teaching. Some of the educators interviewed were of an opinion that the history textbooks and the support material supplied to them could be helpful in the teaching of the subject if properly interpreted. Some argue that the myopic and subjective interpretation of historical events usually causes the content to be influenced by ethnic and sometimes racial interpretations. History textbooks raise sensitive issues and a history educator ought to be careful when confronting the past, especially if this invokes extreme racism,

¹³ R Sieborger, "Reconceptualising South African School History Textbooks", **South African Historical Journal**, Vol. 30, May, 1994, pp. 98-108.

¹⁴ Personal collection. Interview with Mr PJ Modukanele, history educator at Koffiefontein, Free State Province, 18 November 2004.

¹⁵ Personal collection. Interview with Mr M Mbele, history educator in Lindley, Free State Province, 26 May 2003.

¹⁶ Some of the most frequently repeated myths are the following: the myth of the Great Trek, the Mfecane and the empty land, the myth of Dingane and Piet Retief, and that of the Anglo-Boer War.

ethnocentricity or bitterness from both learners and educators. This was endorsed by Chris McGreal in his article entitled "Struggling over a new history" by indicating that in many history textbooks which were used, the Afrikaners were portrayed as victims. In many instances, for example, the Afrikaners were seen as peaceful people who settled at the Cape and were oppressed by the British, and forced to make the Great Trek north. In the north they were attacked by the African chiefs. This, according to McGreal, shows the one-sidedness of South African history with the potential of promoting one racial group at the expense of others.¹⁷ Educators reported that the method of providing a chronological list of suggested empirical content to the point of tedium without any objective interpretation reduces history to a recital of facts and dates from textbooks which learners then regurgitate without really understanding the context of events.

The majority of the textbooks used in the teaching of history had racial connotations which impacted negatively on history as a discipline. In some of these textbooks it was easy to register the emotive language used by these established textbook authors. A typical example of such textbooks is the one written by AN Boyce, drawing on popular accounts dressed up as historical 'source' to flesh out Shaka, the king of the Zulu nation as barbaric.¹⁸ Another typical example is that many history textbooks are shortsighted in interpreting both sides of the story of the 1879 battle at Isandlwana between the Zulus and the British. The victory of the Zulus in this regard was interpreted and described as a massacre.¹⁹

Some history educators interviewed indicated that in some textbooks Shaka was portrayed as the builder of the Zulu nation, and this could be detrimental to the remains of other smaller tribes which had been destroyed by his invasions. When such a lesson is presented in a classroom composed of tribal groupings, Zulu learners might view Shaka as a hero, but that could have negative results for other groups whose forefathers had become victims of Shaka's conquering expeditions. This kind of a lesson has a potential to divide learners ethnically. Confronting the hot historical issues head-on, no matter how uncomfortable they make both educators and learners, is the only possible way to resolve the 'racial' tensions that will almost inevitably emerge in the new history classroom.

¹⁷ **The Teacher**, 30 June 2001.

¹⁸ AN Boyce, **Legacy of the past: A history for Standard 8**, pp. 139-43. For further reading consult also KL Harris, "Transforming school history texts", **South African History Journal**, Vol. 34, May, 1996, pp. 267-75. See also RE Chernis, "The representation of the history of the South African interior in the first half of the nineteenth century in South African school history textbooks", **paper presented at History School Textbooks Writing Conference**, Rustenburg, 3 November 1993, pp. 7-8. See also C de Wet, "The portrayal of black people in South African school history textbooks", **Acta Academica**, 2001, Vol. 33, No. 1, pp. 99-129.

¹⁹ **Business Day**, 27 August 2001; **Daily Dispatch**, 13 September 2002.

To justify the above argument, J Cobbing was of an opinion that South African history has had racial and ethnic elements since long ago. He argued that the spirit of segregation had infiltrated history books of all descriptions so that the various nineteenth century 'African' states were always made to occupy their own chapter without any suggestions that they owed their formation to influences from the wider commercial world or pressure from 'settlers' and their agents. Each African state, it was implied, had come into being purely as a product of its natural impulses. It was assumed by many history educators who taught the section on 'Mfecane' that 'the Zulus' rather than being an insignificant clan had always been a 'nation' that somehow existed outside history, waiting for Shaka to sharpen its military prowess.²⁰ Basing their arguments on the validity of the textbooks used in the teaching of history some educators in the Free State schools claim that idiosyncrasy in these textbooks contribute to racial divisions. Other educators suggest that history as a subject should be discontinued as some educators use historical facts to suit their political affiliation.²¹

In response to the above comments on the status of the history content, historians and history educators expressed their concerns for the future of history in the South African education system in July 1996. In a conference held in Cape Town on the theme 'Future of the Past: The production of history in a changing South Africa', one of the main questions asked and conveyed to education authorities pertained to the critical study of history in schools as the most essential and significant vehicle for citizenship education for the new South Africa. In this conference, questions of race and its impact on the production of history material were repeatedly raised.²² It was also noted through the papers presented that there is a need for silences and power of history which was not captured in the apartheid era textbooks to be considered in the writing of new textbooks. C Hamilton implied that 'old' silences need to be given voice when new textbooks are written.²³

²⁰ J Cobbing, "The Mfecane as alibi: Thoughts on Dithakong and Mbolompo", **Journal of African History**, Vol. 29, No. 3, 1989, pp. 487-519. See also J Matthews, "The riddle of the Mfecane: A re-examination of the notion and some ideas on how to teach it", **Gister en Vandag/Yesterday and Today**, No. 24, October, 1992, pp. 29-33.

²¹ Personal collection. Interview with Mr PJ Modukanele, history educator at Koffiefontein, Free State Province, 18 November 2004.

²² C Hamilton, "The future of the past: New trajectories", **South African Historical Journal**, Vol. 35, November, 1996, pp. 147-8.

²³ **Ibid.**

4.3 The impact of language and terminology on promoting race and ethnicity in the teaching of history

It must be noted that language as the medium of instruction can contribute in rendering history inaccessible and exercise racial and ethnic influences in the teaching of the subject. The dilemma that educators of history face is complicated. If one decides to drop group designations because they are no longer appropriate in the new South Africa, one runs the risk of merely papering over the divisions and conflicts in our history. If on the other hand, one continues to talk about different groups, one runs the risk of perpetuating the very divisions among people. There is no easy way around this dilemma. Avoiding problems of this kind will only slow down the process of getting beyond the damage caused by apartheid.

History is a particular kind of literary genre, and the difficulties which English second language speakers face in mastering its expressive forms are numerous. Learners in many schools commonly face tremendous obstacles in developing effective and accurate communication in the English language, particularly if they are not first language speakers. This suggests the need of English second language learners for support in the learning of history through what they regard as foreign concepts and against the background of such a language. In this case both learners and educators become victims of the language problem. The method of teaching history in many of the township schools has characteristically been that of transmitting an authoritarian version, instead of presenting the subject in a problem solving manner. Matriculants of such schools are at a disadvantage when confronted with the 'history as argument' approach at university level.²⁴ This goes back to the issue of how history educators were trained. What makes the issue of terminology so potentially explosive in South African history is that the idea of groups has become deeply embedded in the South African consciousness. Owing to the nature of apartheid, through the study of history people were led to absorb notions of 'ethnic groups' and 'population groups' as if they were natural and easy to define.

The issue of the medium of instruction in presenting history subject matter is cited as a reason for poor performance. It leads to events being presented in a distorted way and to a certain extent with influences of race and ethnic stereotypes if the matter is presented in another language than the prescribed one. Educators and learners need to develop an awareness of why some terms or concepts are highly charged so that they can build understanding between people. In the teaching of

²⁴ IW Direko, "The teaching of history in Mangaung schools" (M.Ed. dissertation, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, September, 2001), pp. 103-21.

South African history people can feel particularly sensitive in relation to names like 'white', 'coloured', 'Afrikaner', 'black', and so on. These names have complex histories and they evoke deep and often painful feelings. Endorsing this argument the **Sowetan** newspaper in January 1997 regretted the plight of learners from the so-called 'disadvantaged schools', generally as follows: "As for the product of these schools, the pupils are a disgrace to their communities because they can hardly unearth the treasures of their ethnic heritage due to their endeavours to master a foreign language."²⁵ Understandably, sometimes both learners and educators experience difficulties in teaching and learning due to the nature of some of the historical concepts presented in a second language, particularly English. Concepts like democracy, coup d'état, parliaments and constitution are difficult to explain and translate into the Nguni or Sotho languages. When educators are making these translations, they sometimes appear to be of poor quality.

JS Maphalala, formerly attached to the University of Zululand, in his article "History and mother-tongue education in South Africa", suggested that the use of some of the Nguni or Sotho languages in the teaching of the subject could to a certain extent ease the problem of race and ethnic influences. He argued that South African languages should be used interchangeably in the presentation of the subject matter.²⁶

5. PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS IN BYPASSING THE INFLUENCE OF RACE AND ETHNICITY IN THE TEACHING OF HISTORY

5.1 Re-training of history educators

In many instances educators who are teaching the apartheid period in the scope of history and the history of other painful and sensitive national subjects are not adequately prepared to deal with the challenges of their learner's responses, and lack the necessary grounding to foster the debate and judicious reflection because of their own limited grasp of the topic at hand. This is a reflection of the type of training educators received.

Presently educators are faced with the most pressing need to acquire practical training in how to present history in a way that will excite the learners. In arguing the case for improved educator training, the obvious starting point is the fact that

²⁵ **Sowetan**, 3 January 1997. See also MB Mokgalabone, "History concept teaching in black secondary schools", **South African Journal of Education**, Vol. 17, No. 4, pp. 202-8.

²⁶ JS Maphalala, "History and mother-tongue education in South Africa", **New Contree**, Vol. 40, November 1996, pp. 108-18. See also E Mphahlele, "The burden of history and the university's role in the re-creating of its community, its environment", **paper presented at the graduation ceremony**, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 18 May 1995, pp. 1-18.

the basic problem with educator education at present begins with the prior educational preparation of educators. Individuals who begin educator training have usually been taught in a questionable way at school, concerning both method and content. In the training of educators, there is a natural tendency, however unconscious, to mimic one's classroom learning experience in conducting one's teaching.²⁷

The second problem associated with the above blockage is the underlying persistence of the legacy of educator training from the old apartheid history system. At the level of method, educators are taught to teach a fixed historical narrative based on agreed facts. As to content, there are substantial areas of South African history, quite apart from African and world history, with which many educators are wholly unfamiliar.²⁸ Sometimes university programmes perpetuate this.

Educators who were trained in highly partial apartheid history are often left feeling shaky about their own knowledge, and are reluctant to discard old historical themes to embrace new material, to produce their own sources or to criticize textbook dogmas. This, in turn, leads to an uncritical reliance upon the available history textbook, even when that text may be inadequate, ideologically distorted, or even incomprehensible.²⁹

5.2 Methods and strategies for teaching history

Ideally, all learners need to acquire historical understanding of all people in South Africa, as the basis on which to forge a sense of a shared human past. Equally, expressing opposition to the racial arrogance of separatist ethnic histories should in no way obstruct the encouragement of the historical richness inherent in the regional experiences and stories which have a meaningful link to the overarching South African past. The many changes affected in the history syllabus make the subject more interesting, but this depends upon the method an individual educator uses in presenting the learning material. The inclusion of sources like cartoons, newspaper clippings and photographs provide a refreshing change to the somewhat rigid approach and method of teaching history used some decades ago. The educator's own historiographical sense also plays a role in this regard.

It must be noted that it is neither possible nor desirable to ignore race and ethnicity in any curriculum. Accordingly, the aim must be to ensure that whatever the content, it is taught well, to teach the method of studying and analyzing history so

²⁷ Report of the History and Archaeology Panel to the Minister of Education, pp. 25-6.

²⁸ **Ibid.**

²⁹ **Ibid.**

that the learner acquires the ability to analyze events independently, at the level appropriate to his or her age range. This could help learners to develop critical thinking through the study of the past. Both educators and learners need to absorb the fundamental maxim that history influenced by race and ethnicity is inimical to mental development, and to the necessity of developing critical analysis. There will always be a need for a certain amount of 'chalk and talk' teaching, and even for dictating notes or putting notes on the board or on an overhead for students to copy but this should not be the sole, or even main method used in teaching history.³⁰ Traditional methods³¹ of teaching the subject should be discouraged.

The new history methods emphasize the process of how historical knowledge is accumulated. They place emphasis on getting learners to learn the different skills necessary to piece together interpretations of the past. That is, learners learn the analytical and practical skills historians themselves use, instead of only uncritically consuming countless unchallenged facts. The emphasis should be on getting learners to reason and debate, and then subsequently to appreciate the fact that at times it was difficult to be certain of our understanding of historical situations and that there is room for a variety of views.³² Justifying this statement, P Lalu and C Cornell stated that students and learners of history should be encouraged to question and interrogate the historical happenings, for inquiry lies at the heart of history. It is the central approach to teaching history, for without questions there can be no history.³³

One way in which learners of history can acknowledge the existence of race and ethnicity in the teaching and studying of history is the realization of these stereotypes through the development of logical, deductive thinking. This is accomplished in a number of ways. A crucial way is to give learners assignments in which there cannot be a single, definite answer. The materials and teaching methodology should be aimed at highlighting the problem of race and ethnicity, difficulties and uncertainties that relate to these concepts in practical terms. The emphasis should

³⁰ Bam and Visser, pp. 94-5.

³¹ In traditional teaching methods the teacher, after absorbing thousands of facts, usually from the textbook currently used by the school, speaks for thirty minutes or more on the topic; questions are kept to the minimum as they are seen as interruptions; little or no discussion is allowed; once everything has been presented by the teacher, consolidation follows with the students being instructed to copy relevant notes out of the textbook, usually after key sentences have been underlined; exercises consist of questions testing mainly names, places and dates; questions of interpretation are also taken mainly out of the textbook; an examination or controlled test follows which tests memorization of the textbook version of the events; once students have mastered the process of memorization and regurgitation, the teacher is satisfied that he or she has successfully taught history.

³² Bam and Visser, p. 97.

³³ P Lalu and C Cornell, "Staging historical argument: History 1 at the University of the Western Cape", *South African Historical Journal*, Vol. 34, May 1996, pp. 196-210.

be on getting learners to reason and debate, and then subsequently to appreciate the fact that at times it is difficult to be certain of our understanding of historical situations and that there is no room for race and ethnic remarks in the learning and teaching of history. The following teaching strategies as postulated by Bam and Visser may be helpful in this regard: 'open' discussion whereby the teacher as far as possible acts merely as facilitator, setting the agenda but only loosely directing the discussion; a problem-solving approach where learners study how people dealt with the problems of the past and how they managed to find solutions; introducing learners to oral history techniques whereby they learn how to question, interview, listen, empathize, categorize, analyze, extrapolate and synthesize.³⁴

It is educationally good to allow learners to construct their views of the past in the light of their second records in view of promoting multiculturalism, beliefs, attitudes and prior learning (from experiences of family, peers, school, community, religion, film, television, books, computers, etc.). It must also be noted that, depending on their age, learners' second records are necessarily restricted; they do not have the range and depth of knowledge of an adult. They have no experience of living in the historical past, so they lack frames of reference about those incidents which have disappeared. In this context, the role of the educator in making this historical past accessible to learners is of crucial importance. Learners are encouraged to have an imagination of a certain incident in history.

To bypass the influences of race and ethnicity in the teaching of history, history educators should introduce learners to a dimension of history that exists outside the textbook and the classroom. History must not be merely something that the learners 'did' at school, but educators should inculcate awareness of a 'living' past and that history is an inescapable fact of their lives. This could be achieved by incorporating some aspects of local history in the study of South African history.

The use of historical exhibition as a means of presenting history across class and racial-ethnic lines can be nurtured. In larger cities and smaller towns, museums that previously catered for white audiences only are taking the initiative in reaching out to, and mounting exhibits about, other communities. This could be said about the National Museum in Bloemfontein which also depicts the history of the Mangaung people and the Museum Africa in Johannesburg which depicts the life situation which prevailed in Sophiatown. Historical exhibitions are taking a number of approaches, all of which are at least implicitly political. Some exhibitions dramatized the oppression of apartheid, to the discomfort of those who want to forget. Apart from the exhibitions, a large number of people are actively involved or

³⁴ Bam and Visser, pp. 92-127.

interested in creating and popularizing a diverse history which should be the center of curriculum at school level. More often than not, this activity is consciously political.

5.3 The role of the SAHP and SADET

In order to curb the influences of race and ethnicity in the teaching of history, the South African History Project (SAHP)³⁵ was launched by Kader Asmal and it played a significant role. The SAHP was formed to address the crisis in history teaching in South Africa of which the teaching of the subject with the influences of race and ethnicity is a part. It created forums in all provinces around the country to initiate discussions on the nature of history and history teaching in schools and help in devising strategies on how it can be improved and strengthened.³⁶ Although the project did not yield the desired results because of its bureaucratic problems, it created a platform which is conducive for both historians and history teachers to discuss the dilemmas of the subject.

The South African Democracy Trust (SADET) was established after President Thabo Mbeki had indicated his concern about the paucity of the historical records chronicling the arduous and complex road to South Africa's peaceful political settlement after decades of violent conflict. SADET's mission is to examine and analyze events leading to the negotiated settlement and democracy in South Africa, with special reference to events leading to the banning of the liberation movements; the various strategies and tactics adopted in pursuit of the democratic struggle; events leading to the advent of democracy; the response of the apartheid regime to the activities of the liberation movements, including changes to the nature of the state and the evolution of counter-revolutionary strategy and policies to contain resistance; and the dynamics underpinning the negotiation process from 1990 to 1994.³⁷ Through initiatives such as those of SAHP and SADET from the government's side in the reconstruction of history, the author is convinced that history will be revived as a school subject and the influences of race and ethnicity eliminated in its teaching. Some people may argue that the African National Congress Government is taking the same route as that of the National Party in handling history as a subject whereby the government uses the subject as a political springboard. It is clear to the author that the two are incomparable.

³⁵ The South African History Project was launched by the former Minister of Education, Professor Kader Asmal. It was composed by history researchers and educators. It had representatives in various provinces. The project aimed at promoting a love for the subject, building a dedicated team of educators who are researchers, developing inquiry skills among learners, training learners to deal with different sources, identify bias, propaganda and prejudice in sources and to use history to strengthen a culture of democracy and human rights.

³⁶ <http://education.pwv.gov.za/sahp/>

³⁷ "The road to democracy in South Africa", *SADET*, Vol. 1 (1960-1970), pp. xiii-xx.

6. CONCLUSION

In the light of the many problems and frustrations that beset the teaching of South African history, particularly the period of apartheid, a persistent question which crops up from the people's minds is whether it makes sense still to talk about the teaching of a kind of history which fails to bypass the race and ethnic stereotypes. From the historical point of view, the author deems it necessary to continue the debate on the teaching of history although there are such stereotypes. History educators have a responsibility to teach the subject to the benefit of all South Africans, irrespective of race and ethnicity. Proper and successful teaching of history could promote unity amongst the South African citizens.