

# **TEACHING WORLD HISTORY AT SENIOR PRIMARY AND SECONDARY LEVELS IN SOUTH AFRICA - A PRACTICAL MODEL**

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The perception of a world history has been present among Western historians since the early Christian period, and during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries a number of universal histories were published which appealed to a large reading public. During the nineteenth century an emphasis on the thorough scrutiny of original documents resulted in historians concentrating on subjects of a very limited scope. Although some attention was paid to world history, the works which appeared had a strong Eurocentric bias. In the twentieth century the study of world history became popular again and recently a large number of textbooks, mainly intended for world history courses at American schools and universities, have appeared. In South Africa the requests by educationalists for a multi-cultural approach has stimulated the teaching of universal history at tertiary and school level. This article attempts to point out various ways in which universal history concepts would make a multicultural approach in history courses possible.

## **2. WORLD OR GLOBAL HISTORY TEACHING**

Universal history, or world history as it is more commonly known as, must in this context be understood as an account, so far as it is available, of mankind's past. The learning and teaching of

world history involve questions such as: are the contents a well thought-through selection, and what will be the most appropriate method(s) of teaching?

Studies abroad regarding culture and its diversity within a universal frame appear to be vast in number. However, little has been done in practice to assist the teacher/lecturer on **how** to address topics on multiple/universal cultural experiences and/or views or how to deal with topics on a universal basis. In USA academic circles the multi-cultural teaching perspective in education has gained support, whereas in the UK a similar trend since the sixties was to refer to such histories as world history. The key issues seem to have been moulded into one decisive concept, namely that the learning process within such a curriculum must be facilitating and integrating.

To promote such a facilitating or integrating approach, and in order to enhance the development of perspective in history education, the promotion of a universal approach on topics/ideas/concepts in history (on local, regional, national and international level) is definitely important and needs to be addressed practically. Aspects such as the voice of the child and dialogic inquiry in the classroom could then be applied and would promote the critical thinking and other skills which are needed in many vocations.

History is regarded as a very controversial subject in South African schools. One of the complaints against the subject is the inability of its presenters to draw clear distinctions between factual content and the broader meaning of this content. To encourage history teachers and lecturers to practise the universal approach, a practical focus is needed to indicate whether there are in fact ways in history teaching by means of which the complex diversity of communities and cultures could effectively be dealt with on a universal basis.

During the last three decades many texts have appeared which give an overview of world history in one or two volumes. The texts of McNeill (1963) and Stavrianos (1991), which both provide a synthesis without forcing world history into a philosophical system, have had an important influence on the teaching of world history. On secondary level the Department of Education and Science in the UK published an Education Pamphlet entitled "Towards World History" (1967). Several publications followed in the seventies. In 1977 Richard Tames commented, after writing on Islam in History, as follows: *The Moslem brush has painted such large tracts of time and space during the last fourteen hundred years that the historical panorama which did not feature them could be nothing but a wild and grotesque distortion of reality.* This can equally be said of China, for example. The recent replacement of introductory courses on the history of the Western Civilization by courses on world history at many American universities and colleges has stimulated the writing of a large number of textbooks on world history. These books have been written from various perspectives, including a feminist viewpoint. At present there is considerable interest in world history as a field of study and it is even regarded as an area of historical specialization.

In 1982 the World History Association was established as a society for the promotion of world history as an academic discipline to stimulate the teaching of world history as an academic discipline as well as to stimulate the teaching of world history at school and university levels. The society has members from all over the world, but American historians are in the majority. The USA remains the leading country with regard to the writing and studying of world history. In South Africa no books on world history have been published yet, but courses in world history have recently been introduced at a number of universities, including Potchefstroom University. However, this is not the case at secondary level education in South African schools. Traces of approaching primary school level history on a more universal basis are evident and invigorating. Topics such as the child's liaison with his origins on a personal and collective level (known as family history and general socialising history) are fostered through certain experiences offered to him of both a local and global character.

### **3. A METHOD IN TEACHING WORLD HISTORY**

#### **3.1 To be biased or not to be biased in the selection process**

Educational policy and focus in the nineties are undoubtedly dictated by globalization. Sir Christopher Ball, President of the British Comparative and International Education Society, recently made some interesting points on the future of curriculum planning and specifically on what a Global Core Curriculum should look like. He mentioned that seven domains of learning should be incorporated, namely learning how to learn, a world language, a mother-tongue language, numeracy, social skills, religion including values and ethics, and finally cultural literacy as the seventh domain. It is within this last domain that world history teaching may be able to improve on the traditional methods of history teaching. It is hoped that the National Education Department of South Africa will devote attention to this approach in the forthcoming curriculum or in the near future.

The task of how to incorporate different cultures in one national history curriculum is a formidable one that will probably always be criticized for appearing to be biased towards certain cultures or for not paying sufficient attention to another culture. Ross E. Dunn sees the alternative conception of history as follows:

Let us rather start with the premise that the fundamental aim of a world history course is not to introduce students to a select number of 'foreign cultures' but to teach them about the large scale of dynamic forces that have over millennia shaped the human community...I use the world forces because it is a strong word, but we might also speak of developments, processes or patterns of change as the primary subject matter of world history, etc....

To reach the level of teaching that Ross Dunn is talking about historians in South Africa would have to concentrate on the development of practical classroom activities or approaches that would enhance the teaching of a universal perspective on the diversity of cultures or on a variety of aspects (such as concepts or patterns). These approaches would spontaneously portray an intercultural or cross-cultural character with regard to the teaching contents.

The development of new history curricula for South Africa on primary and especially secondary levels will require much research and thought from a variety of fields of expertise, representative of various cultures, organisations and academic institutions. The same would apply to the design of a world syllabus and methods for practising universal approaches to history. If a variety of fields of expertise, as mentioned, are involved in selecting from a mass of evidence and information that must cover a world perspective on certain dynamic forces or patterns (to quote the example of Dunn) it lowers the chances of the curricula being biased and subjective. In the meantime nothing prevents teachers from approaching a topic(s) in a universal way.

#### **3.2 Syllabus, aims and world history**

Although history teachers in South African schools have never in the past formally taught world history, some of the aims set in syllabi of previous years have been geared towards achieving just this.

The following extracts from present syllabi are designed to meet important aims in history teaching and are directed towards enhancing a universal view of humankind (see example of aims in diagram 1).

## DIAGRAM 1

### TEACHING AIMS DIRECTED TOWARDS WORLD HISTORY\*

#### 1. Std. 2-5

- **TO STUDY THE HISTORY OF THEIR COUNTRY AGAINST THE BACKGROUND OF OVERSEAS EVENTS**
- **To encourage pupils to realise that the present is the heritage of the past and the future is in its turn influenced by the present...**
- **TO BROADEN THE PUPILS' CONCEPT OF SPACE, TIME AND REALITY**

#### 2. Std. 5-7

- **To contribute to the personal development of pupils**
- **To contribute to [the understanding of] the development of attitudes and values**
- **TO CONTRIBUTE TO AN UNDERSTANDING AND APPRECIATION OF THEIR HERITAGE AND THAT OF OTHER PEOPLES AND CULTURES**

#### 3. Std. 8-10

- **KNOWLEDGE:** for example, how to use a variety of sources/information
- **INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENT:** for example, the relation between historical events and between history and other disciplines
- **ATTITUDE:** for example, to gain a balanced appreciation of the historical contributions/backdrops and norms of groups/cultures/countries, etc.

\* Those aims that are directly linked to universal issues are in capital letters

### 3.3 A practical model for the teaching of world history

A number of methodological teaching steps should be taken into consideration before teachers can effectively adopt an approach in world history teaching. The following approach to world history, developed by the author and called the *universal interdisciplinary comparative approach*, consists of three parts and aims to create a universal awareness. The steps towards creating a basis for this approach are:



#### Step one

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The basic historical content which has been set within the objectives of a syllabus theme must first be taught.



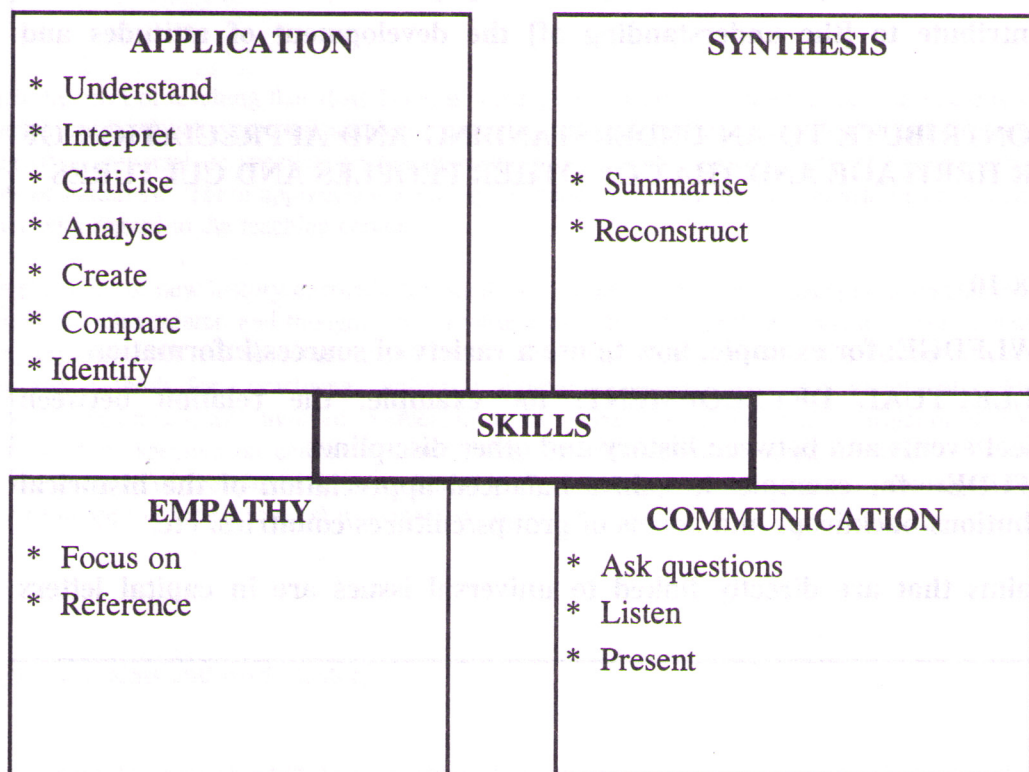
#### Step two

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The concept 'universal' and the varieties of ways in which it can be used as a teaching method must be understood. It is also important to recognise the universal approach as part of the objectives by which higher cognitive skills are promoted (see diagram 2).

**DIAGRAM 2**

#### **A SELECTION OF SKILLS THAT MAY PROMOTE THE PORTRAYAL OF THE UNIVERSAL CONCEPT IN HISTORY TEACHING**



### ✧ Step three

#### *Using the universal interdisciplinary comparative approach*

- ✦ The universal approach can be used as a synthesis of one or more identified topics that appear in a theme or themes of a history syllabus (see diagram 3).
- ✦ It must be decided whether the above-mentioned universal interdisciplinary comparative approach on the identified topic will only cover a local setting, [see diagram 3 for universal method no. 1] and/or both a national\international one too [see diagram 3 for the universal method no 2 and universal method no. 3]. The teaching approach to these proposed universal methods does not always have to be as rigid as has been illustrated in diagram no. 3, for example, starting from universal concept no. 1.
- ✦ The order of presenting the three proposed universal methods in diagram three can vary by starting with method no. 3 and then going on to no. 2 followed by no. 1, or even starting with no.2. The reason for beginning with the local history as first universal method is because it seems to be a better option to first orientate the pupils\students to aspects familiar to them, before trying to extend these familiarities or similarities on to a national or\and international level.
- ✦ Each of the proposed universal methods can also be used separately from the others because each method contains some characteristics of presenting a focused global view. However, if universal method 3 is selected as a teaching approach or methodology, one would expect that this approach would be regarded as the most fundamental section needed to advance the teaching of universal or world history (in the true sense) as presented by some of the foremost historians.
- ✦ In the process of teaching specific contents with the aid of one of the universal methods proposed, a variety of material on a selected topic (see diagram 3) should be presented or provided to the students\pupils together with enough information\source directions (e.g. various perspectives on the same issue) in order to undertake the research as a task\project or tutorial. Questions such as the role\impact of a specific topic in a community or worldwide could be debated. Individual and group work could be enhanced if questions such as these are set.
- ✦ Perceptions of time and space that might produce a difference in values on a local\national\international level should be discussed and acknowledged. At no time should the teacher use his\her position to provide final answers. There are no such things as absolute answers\solutions in history. It is high time that teachers acknowledge motivated presentations\discussions by pupils or students by considering an evaluation mark on a carefully planned scale of applicable criteria.
- ✦ The teaching of the proposed universal concepts could be constructively incorporated as part of several other approaches or methods the teacher intends to use in his\her year planning.
- ✦ The nature of some of these topics mentioned in diagram 3 also makes possible further interdisciplinary study (e.g. environmental history, technology, population trends in demographic history, the social role of women, history and poetry - its influence on mankind, etc.). History teachers should use these opportunities more frequently because they form an indispensable part of the creation of a basis for a global view on one or more aspects of human history. To demonstrate the *universal interdisciplinary comparative approach* in a more practical way, the following two examples, for the senior primary and secondary level, are proposed with the aid of the information given in diagrams 2 and 3:

# A DIAGRAMMATIC GUIDELINE TO USE IN HISTORY TEACHING THAT WOULD CONTRIBUTE TO A UNIVERSAL INTERDISCIPLINARY COMPARATIVE APPROACH

DIAGRAM 3

## Examples of possible topics:

- \* Race
- \* Ethnicity
- \* Class
- \* Gender
- \* Culture
- \* Perceptions
- \* Religion
- \* Economy
- \* Politics
- \* Language
- \* Social aspects (environment; leadership; family; ideologies; communications systems)
- \* Other (power; education; war; constitutional setting; intolerance)

## UNIVERSAL METHOD NO.3

### International History

(Choose any appropriate topic and skill(s))

- \* Cover all the views involved in a specific historical event on a specific topic in a specific country abroad / **OR**
- \* Compare historical events from particular or different periods of the past on a specific topic with a similar event in two or more other countries (preferably a selection of countries from all over the world) / **OR**
- \* Compare historical events (past or contemporary) on a specific topic on a local and national level with a similar aspect in a country abroad

intolerance)

constitutional setting;

## UNIVERSAL METHOD NO. 1

### Local History

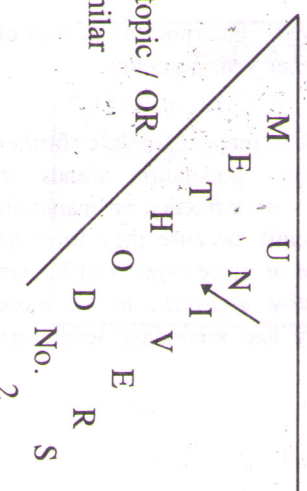
(Choose any appropriate topic and skill(s))

- \* Cover and compare all the perspectives involved in a specific historical event completely/ **OR**
- \* Compare a contemporary setting(s) with a past setting(s) on a specific topic in a selected local area

### National History

(Choose any appropriate topic and skill(s))

- \* Cover and compare all the views involved in a specific historical event with a past setting(s) on a specific topic / **OR**
- \* Compare a contemporary setting(s) with a past setting(s) on a specific topic / **OR**
- \* Compare a national historical event on a specific topic with a similar event in a specific local setting



**Example One**  
**Senior Primary level**  
**(South African History)**  
**Std. 5**

**To present the Universal method no. 3 [by starting with the Contemporary, the Local → the National → and the International]**

***History Theme: The development and way of life of the inhabitants at the Cape***

**Aims:** See example as set in diagram 1. Add to explain the concepts that are used in this example.

✧ **Contemporary local**

(Potchefstroom as example)

\* Tswana people: social and economic (e.g. slavery and labour)

[see teaching method in diagram 3]

✧ **National**

The people of the Cape: Wine farming, grain farming and others

✧ **International**

Africa: Italy: The development of agriculture and industries.

[Interdisciplinary and comparative]

✧ **Questions to pupils (as part of the evaluation)**

See selection of skills in diagram no. 2. For example, compare the extent to which the socio-economic life of the Tswana people differs from that previously practised in the Cape by the slaves.

**Example two**

**Secondary level**

**(South African History)**

**Std. 8**

**To present the Universal concept no. 3 [by starting with the National → then the International → followed by the Local]**

***History Theme: Conflict over land and resources: [aspects of race and class]***

**Aims:** See example as set in diagram 1. Add to explain the relevant concepts in this example.

✧ ***National***

S.A. before 1840: Mzilikazi and the Ndebele (Mfecane/Difaqane)

S.A. after 1840: The Sandriver and Bloemfontein Conventions and Keate verdict as part of the struggle for land/freedom by e.g. whites and the Griquas]

✧ ***International***

France, 1789-1795: The political, economic and social factors which led to the French Revolution [with land resources forming part of the of the inner conflict and struggle]

✧ ***Local/regional/provincial (e.g. Potchefstroom)***

1902-1948: The struggle of the Indians to use the available resources in the local economic setup of the given period OR the forced removal position of the Barolong

✧ ***Questions to pupils***

See selections of skills in diagram 2 to be used as part of the evaluation process too: for example, to identify the differences/similarities that may be found in the texts studied with regard to method(s) of conflict

**An example of a syllabus proposed by James Henderson (1979)**

## A Syllabus Proposal for World History

### AGE GROUP: 11-12 YEARS

**The Constants of Early World History** - A comparative study of early man in Britain and globally

### AGE GROUP: 12-13 YEARS

**The Variables of World Civilisations** - (alternatives)

1. *Renaissance Europe OR*
2. *17th-century England OR*
3. *12th-century Europe OR*
4. *Cities: Athens, Rome, London OR*
5. *The Topic of AGRICULTURE treated in historical terms of development*

### AGE GROUP: 13-14 YEARS

**The Variables of World Civilisations** - (alternative)

1. *Mogul India OR*
2. *The Incas of Peru OR*
3. *The American 'South' OR*
4. *Cities: Constantinople, Jerusalem, New Orleans OR*
5. *The Topic of religious BELIEFS*

### AGE GROUP: 14-15 YEARS

**The Variables of World Civilisations** - (alternatives)

1. *The Manchu Empire OR*
2. *The Arab Caliphates OR*
3. *Early Kingdom of Africa OR*
4. *Cities: Peking, Alexandria, Paris OR*
5. *The Topic of INDUSTRIALIZATION treated in historical terms of development*

### AGE GROUP: 15-16 YEARS

**The Constants of Contemporary World History**

The Shaping Forces of Our Times:

1914 - A Farewell to European History

The Power of the USA

The Power of the USSR

The Power of China

The Potential of the Third World

The Emerging Organs of World Order

### Example Three

#### A lesson on secondary level

#### The universal concept in history

#### Std. 7

**AIM** according to the diagrammatic guideline on the universal interdisciplinary comparative approach:

**a section of universal method no. 3, namely**

"To compare historical events from different periods of the past on a specific topic with a similar event in two or more countries."

◇ **Aims of lesson series**

To facilitate a representative (cultural diverse) variety of examples on the topic of nationalism in order to assist the pupil to (i) obtain a global perspective on the topic (ii) identify, compare and understand the various examples of nationalism (iii) emphatically take cognisance of ways in which peoples reacted to obtain and preserve what they felt belong to them/have a right to as humans.

◇ **Topic/Theme: Nationalism**

◇ **Std 7-Interim syllabus topics that can be used in a lesson/lesson series to portray an universal approach:**

Represent the inter-national section	☆ Nationalism in Europe with Italy as example
	☆ Nationalism in the Middle East with Arabia as example
Represents the Africa section	☆ Independence movements in Africa with focus on Pan-Africanism (use one country as a specific example)
Represents the South African section	☆ The Defiance Campaign and Freedom Charter or/and The Afrikaner in the Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902

◇ **Notes on the methodology**

The teacher will present the topic as a synopsis to what has already been dealt with in the syllabus. In this lesson series the methodology will aim at linking all the syllabus examples (as given above) with the topic (as given above). However, the teacher must make certain that the pupils managed the basic factual contents in order to address this global approach.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Teaching pupils and students from a universally orientated framework involves the use of one or more universal history concepts. A critical attitude to, for example, a Marxist approach to history can only be formed if the student understands general concepts such as slavery, feudalism and capitalism and has an idea of their role in world history. If these concepts are taught at school level, it becomes easier to develop a sensitivity towards various philosophies and ideologies which influence historical interpretation. Of course the ways in which teachers will teach universal history concepts are also influenced by their own views of history. The effects of that can be reduced by working more co-operatively on themes.

To impose a world approach in the history classroom therefore requires more than merely a changing of curriculum. Apart from the above-mentioned requirements/ considerations, appropriate reading material, research and financial support are needed to implement the long-term aims of history based on the universal approach, **and not the political agenda of the day**, as the guiding principle..

It is furthermore very important for tertiary institutions involved in the training of history teachers to give assistance in the creation of programmes/guidelines to convey the history of human kind and its cultural diversity in a universal way in their discipline. If this can be done, the South African educator will probably be a pioneer in pointing the way to other countries which have as yet not succeeded in implementing the universal concept of history practice adequately. The aim of this article was to propose practical examples in one model of how a universal approach to history could be adopted in the classroom by using three different universal methods: the model was named the **universal interdisciplinary comparative approach**.

To conclude with the words Thomas Bender on history:

*The progress of historians and teachers in thinking about our society as a whole, in thinking about the shape of a synthesis that incorporates groups and dimensions of individual experience previously omitted, is directly related to our chances for success in renovating and reinvigorating our civic life ....*

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