

CORRESPONDENCE

HISTORY AND PREPARATION FOR LIFE

Faith Saunders, 8 Marks Avenue, Farrar Park, Boksburg writes:

I concur with the article in the May 1993 issue of *Yesterday and Today* that History is not boring, irrelevant and of no use to me while I am studying or once I have completed my schooling (either secondary or tertiary). The skills, both complex and simple, learned during a history lesson will stand me in good stead to tackle life with more objectivity than if I had no historical education.

Being a History Didactics student at RAU I wondered how hard could it be to teach History - just give pupils facts and figures and let them regurgitate these in either tests or essays? Right? Wrong!! It was here that my Professor brought all his students face to face with the endless possibilities and skills history can provide. No one was more surprised than me to see how History, if taught correctly, can be an indispensable tool to be used by pupils not only in schooling but in life. No, I am not exaggerating! Prove it? Sure!

Let us just take a very basic example. You have a number of newspapers in front of you. Each newspaper has leading articles which might or might not correspond with the view of other newspapers' leading articles. How would you know the difference? Easy you say - by comparing, analysing, contrasting, examining and assimilating each article separately. Would an average high school pupil go to all that trouble? I have my doubts. Why, one might ask? Does he possess these assimilation, comparison, etc. skills? If not, where will he acquire them? In a History lesson with a capable, prepared, motivated and enthusiastic teacher! Here the pupils practise these skills so that they are so finely tuned that any discrepancy between two articles, statements etc. will be as obvious as a book without pages.

Let me quote from Boyce: "History consists essentially in seeing the past through the eyes of the present in the light of its problems". We as History teachers and prospective History teachers must use History as a tool to enable pupils to understand their own times. In the 'New South Africa' (to coin a phrase) we can use the results of America's 1960s race relations to examine our own race relations and guard against such discrimination, bloodshed and ill-feeling by being taught to accept the diversities within a country and work within these diversities. We can use the Holocaust to heighten the pupil's awareness of the tragedies and atrocities being committed in Bosnia-Herzegovina. What other subject teaches one to use the past to examine the present and prepare for the future with optimism? Very few - if any.

History, if taught correctly, can be used to cultivate healthy attitudes of mind and habits of thought in pupils. One must remember that pumping them full of information has a short-term effect. They lose this factual knowledge but pupils do not lose values and habits. Teachers, please inculcate (not indoctrinate) sound (good) basic values!

When all the eligible citizens of this country vote on a new government one hopes that all those people understand the concept and consequences of the vote they cast. History gives us an idea of parliamentary proceedings and activities of local municipal councils. History can be used to instil intelligent patriotism - not a black country versus a white country, but **our** country.

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pupils' imagination and self-expression; orientate the pupils in time.

Who said History was not relevant and offered nothing to the pupil? I am encouraged that I have been taught what was needed to teach these vital skills to my present and prospective pupils!