

LOCAL HISTORY TEACHING IN THE OVERBERG REGION OF THE WESTERN CAPE: THE CASE OF THE ELIM PRIMARY SCHOOL

Sonja Schoeman & Clarence Visagie
Department of Curriculum and Instructional Studies
University of South Africa
schoes@unisa.ac.za

Abstract

The problem of this study deals with the indifference of the Grade 8 learners of the Elim Primary School towards school History, and its relevance to their everyday lives. The following research question was formulated: What can the Social Sciences teachers at the Elim Primary School do differently to make the subject more relevant and interesting to the Grade 8 learners? It was concluded that the learners had to be more actively involved in the local history of their region. To this end, a series of four local history lessons with as topic Heritage – The village of Elim: past and present was designed and implemented. The lessons were mainly for enrichment purposes, linked to Heritage Day of 24 September, and to create interest in and enjoyment of the study of history. The research design was a qualitative single case study of the Elim Primary School's visit to a local heritage site, the Elim Moravian Mission Town. It was a detailed explanatory narrative of the mechanics of a local history teaching strategy – two classroom lessons and two fieldtrips to the heritage site concluded by a feedback, reflection and assessment session in the classroom. The hands-on personal experience of the Grade 8 Social Sciences learners as young historians was illustrated by means of seven images which included images of the material sources and relics and the learners doing history as young historians. The case study resulted in step-by-step guidelines for the preparation and implementation of a local history teaching strategy. The historical imagination of the learners was also operationalised.

Keywords: Local history; Elim Primary School; Overberg; Western Cape; Social Sciences; CAPS; Fieldtrips; Young historians.

Introduction

In this article, the researchers wanted to demonstrate how the Grade 8 learners of the Elim Primary School in the Overberg region of the Western Cape are taught the specific aims, skills and concepts of History as part of Social Sciences. These are the specific aims, skills and concepts as prescribed

in the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) document for senior phase (Grade 7 to 9) Social Sciences. The Elim Primary School is located in the town of Elim which was founded in 1824 as the Moravian Missionary Station. The town is located in the most southern Agulhas region of the Overberg with Bredasdorp as the biggest town. The Elim Primary School is providing schooling for learners from Grades 1 to 8 (Visagie, 2014:Personal experience). Although, the Grade 8s are also accommodated in the primary school, the teaching of History at the Elim Primary School is taking place within the broader curriculum reform and policy changes as promulgated on national level by the Department of Basic Education in 2011 (Departement van Basiese Onderwys, 2011:2). The focus in this article is on the teaching of the history of the local Elim community to the Grade 8 Social Sciences learners.

Problem statement

The problem statement of this article, focuses on the lack of interest in H(h)istory among the Grade 8 learners of the Elim Primary School. The researchers pondered on the question of, Why are the Grade 8 learners of the Elim Primary School unenthusiastic about the studying of History? During informal classroom discussions it became apparent that the “relevance” of H(h)istory seems to be the overwhelming reason. The researchers argued that if the Grade 8 learners can relate what they are studying in the classroom to their everyday lives, they will show more interest in the subject. Some of the identified reasons that are contributing to the learners’ indifference towards school History are: sitting in rows and listening to the teacher’s voice; providing too much information in a short period of time; and the sole use of learner’s books, while the good stuff is often outside the classroom. It was concluded that the learners of the Elim Primary School also need to be more actively involved in the stories of their own town, i.e. the local history (Visagie, 2013:Personal experience, April to June). The conclusion was that the Social Sciences teachers of the Elim Primary School should have to make H(h)istory more interesting to the learners, involve them in authentic activities and use a variety of teaching strategies. Designing interesting, learner-centered and authentic teaching and learning experiences seemed to be the solution. Consequently, the following research question was formulated: What can the Social Sciences teachers at the Elim Primary School do differently to make the subject more relevant and interesting to the Grade 8 learners?

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to report, as a case study, the mechanics of the design and implementation of a series of local history lessons in the Social Sciences Department of the Elim Primary School as response to the learners' view that the good stuff is often outside the classroom. To this end, enrichment local history lessons were designed and implemented. An additional aim was also to utilise the parallel teaching method and use one of the specific aims for History as set out in the CAPS document for Social Sciences (Departement van Basiese Onderwys, 2011:10), namely to create an interest in and enjoyment of the study of History. Consequently, a visit to a local heritage site was planned in addition to the everyday teaching in the classroom, as it was argued that a hands-on personal experience at a familiar heritage site concluded with written activities using primary sources could:

- improve the Grade 8 learners at the Elim Primary School's view of History;
- prepare them for the Heritage day activities on 24 September and demonstrate the importance of Heritage day;
- revisit the topics of local history (Grade 4) and Colonisation of the Cape in the 17th Century (Grade 7);
- apply the parallel teaching method to provide the learners with freedom of participation and ensure the efficiency of the instruction;
- enhance the learners' historical literacy skills;
- conceptualise and contextualise the learners' historical knowledge of the region, and
- develop the learners' historical literacy abilities to a higher level, namely by "Doing history" as young historians.

Research design

The research design of this study was a qualitative single case study. The term case study has multiple meanings. It can be used to describe a unit of analysis (such as a case study of a particular school), or to describe a research method (Maree *et al*, 2012:94). According to Bromley (1990:302), case study research is a "... systematic inquiry into an event or a set of related events which aims to describe and explain the phenomenon of interest." As this article describes the study of a particular school (the Elim Primary School), the term case study for this study refers to a unit of analysis. Multiple sources (written and material sources or relics) were used to gather the information.

The researchers determined in advance what evidence to gather and what analysis techniques to use with the gathered information to answer the research question (Creswell, 1997:120-125). The purpose of this case study research was to gain greater insight and understanding of the dynamics of a specific situation, namely how to improve the Grade 8 Social Sciences learners of the Elim Primary School's view of History by using local history (Van Eeden, 2012:1-33; Van Eeden, 2010:23-50) of the region (the Elim Moravian Mission Town).

Literature study

The theoretical lens of this study was Bernstein's (1999:157-173) knowledge structure theory. According to Bernstein (1999:157-173), the knowledge structure theory refers to the notion that the knowledge in any discipline can be divided into two distinct types of knowledge, namely vertical knowledge and horizontal knowledge. Vertical knowledge represents an integrated kind of knowledge that is inclusive, integrated and abstract, while horizontal knowledge is applied to acknowledge how a historical specialisation develops from a mode of interrogation to the construction of a historical text (Bertram, 2008:155-177).

Apart from the above, with the Elim Primary School as case study, it was also necessary to explore History teaching at the school using constructivism as conceptual framework. According to Davids' (2013:109-124) explanation of constructivism, who uses Foucault's deconstruction in history education, it is necessary to move from dogma to a discourse of improving democracy in subjects. By applying this principle to History teaching, the learners have to learn how to engage independently with history at classroom level. Scholars such as Warnich and Meyer (2013:13-44), also recommended learner-centred teaching and learning and informal and formal assessment practices in Social Sciences and History education. The British historian, Geoffrey Elton (as quoted in Bertram, 2008:155-177) argues that the purpose of history was not to produce research scholars only, but rather that schools should concentrate on and encourage interest in and some understanding of the past. Consequently, the above arguments influenced the researchers' choice of the case study research design, namely that history teaching can lead to the cultivation of the learners' construction of historical knowledge through reading, writing and doing history in accordance with their levels of understanding and interpretation.

With the proposed theoretical lens and conceptual framework in mind, the case study was planned for the second quarter (April to June) of 2013. The outcome of the case study was envisaged as the conceptualisation and contextualisation of the Social Sciences learners' personal view and experiences of History as subject. Hence, the researchers also wanted to demonstrate the mechanics of History teaching at the Elim Primary School using a local history project, namely the Elim Moravian Mission Town. The classroom sources used for the project was the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement for Social Sciences (2011); the learner's books used for Grade 8 Social Sciences at the school, namely Earle, Keats, Clacherty, Roberts, Thraves and Doubell's book, entitled *Sosiale Wetenskappe Vandag: Graad 8 Leerdersboek* published in 2013 by Maskew Miller Longman; material sources or relics from the past (three historical buildings -the slave monument, church and museum) and general every day articles (such as the German cemetery and graves and museum articles) which contain information relating to the origins and activities of the early inhabitants of the village; the hand-outs with information on slavery and the Dutch Colonisation of the Cape in the 17th Century; and worksheets, note books and writing materials.

For the purposes of this study, the concept local history refers to the study of history in a geographically local context which concentrates on the local community (Sauvin, 1998:50). The concept material sources or relics from the past refers to one of the sources that may be studied by the young historian to know more about the past. Material sources or relics are the remains of people and their activities. These include architectural sources such as buildings and general everyday articles such as cemeteries and graves. These sources are called artefacts. Studying material sources or relics from the past at a site such as a museum can be a useful way of backing up what learners know about history from other historical sources such as documents (Sauvin, 1998:47). Written sources or documentary evidence are evidence which can be found and read today. It includes material written by people of the time who experienced or witness events. Examples of written sources or documentary evidence are letters, advertisements, official documents and so forth (Fines, 1993:20-73; Matthews *et al*, 1992:25).

Case study: Keeping the Grade 8 learners interested and enthusiastic about History and/or histories

Against the background of the above literature review, in this section it is

demonstrated how a series of four History lessons were designed and taught to the Grade 8 Social Sciences learners of the Elim Primary School during the second quarter of 2013. The lessons were for enrichment purposes. The theme of the lessons was, Heritage with special reference to the local history of Elim village. The mission station at Elim was established in 1824, with the arrival of the German missionaries at the Cape of Good Hope. Biblically, the word Elim refers to a place of cooling waters and palm trees. The Elim Mission Station was also a refuge, initially for the indigenous Khoi people and later for the hundreds of destitute slaves who were emancipated in 1834. The mission station was established by Bishop Hallbeck on 24 May 1824 (South African Tourism Information, 2014: <http://www.southafrica.net/za/en/articles/entry/article-southafrica.net-elim-moravian-miss...>).

Apart from two classroom lessons, two field trips were also used as part of the teaching strategy for the theme. It was chosen in accordance to Bernstein's (1999:157-173) structure of vertical and horizontal knowledge, and the descriptions of Foucault (as explained in Davids, 2013:109-124) about the construction of the individual self. Both scholars provided a reasonable account of how learners can deepen their historical literacy through the reading of learner's books and other relevant secondary sources, but also how they can develop their constructions of historical narratives as young historians, thus doing history. A constructivist approach to the teaching and learning of the lessons was also followed: the prescribed content, concepts and skills and assessment strategies as set out in the CAPS document (2011) and included in the learner's books were combined with fieldwork where the learners were exposed to a "Doing history" experience. Bertram (2008:157-177) emphasised the importance of learning the process of the discipline at school. She argued that it was not sufficient for learners to learn facts constructed by historians, but that they should learn the skills that historians use. The use of activities and discovery learning, where the learners are not only taught historical content, but where they also discover historical knowledge with the support of the History teacher, are also emphasised by Warnich and Meyer (2013:13-44). For learners to work effectively with horizontal historical knowledge (fieldwork as strategy in this article) and vertical knowledge (transcending their subject knowledge to higher levels of understanding and abstraction – becoming young historians in this article), the learners have to conceptualise and contextualise their history learning at school level. With its emphasis on freedom of participation and efficient instruction, the parallel teaching method was also used as road map for the

teaching of the four lessons. In conclusion: a learner-centred approach was used with the teachers as facilitators and the learners as active participants in whole class discussions, group work activities, peer group discussions and individual essay writing.

The topic of the lessons was: Heritage day – The village of Elim: past and present. The aims of the lessons were related to the requirements as prescribed in the CAPS curriculum and policy document (Departement van Basiese Onderwys, 2011:9-11), namely (1) to deepen the learners' knowledge of key historical events; (2) to develop the learners' knowledge about how a historical text are produced, with the focus on chronology and explanations; and (3) to cultivate the learners' knowledge of how historians read primary sources. Two objectives were formulated to achieve the above aims. On the one hand, the learners had to conceptualise the historical content and texts in the prescribed learner's book and included in the hand-outs. This included reading, analysis and writing abilities towards the understanding of the historical sources. On the other hand, the learners had to understand how historians are working to construct a historical narrative, in other words, how to do history. The parallel teaching method was applied to the whole class, group and peer discussions based on the information and activities in the learner's book and the hand-outs, followed by the field trips to the heritage site, and finally, a feedback, reflection and assessment session. Hence, two History classroom periods followed by two fieldtrips were used to achieve the aims and objectives of the four lessons. The permission of the school principal was obtained for the fieldtrips.

An elaboration of the four lessons follows in the following three subsections:

First two lessons: The classroom periods

During the first two lessons, the learner's book entitled *Sosiale Wetenskappe Vandag: Graad 8 Leerdersboek* (2013) was used. The historical content, concepts and skills presented in the book was characterises by short explanations of the topic by the writers, who mainly used secondary sources, but included a few primary sources as well. Besides the textbook, the CAPS document for Social Sciences (2011, the history sections) was also used. The latter provided descriptions of the content necessary for the teacher to teach, as well as some requirements in terms of the assessment of the learners' historical knowledge, participation in historical source analysis and the prescribed values for

Grade 8. In terms of the historical content, a hand-out, with information from the Grades 5 and 7 learner's books respectively, was also distributed to the learners. The latter included a short description of certain events that happened during the Dutch Colonisation of the Cape in the 17th Century with special reference to slavery, and constructed a narrative interpretation mainly from the viewpoints of the slaves and the Dutch colonists. Knowledge of the three distinct perspectives (conservative perspective, liberal perspective and radical perspective) of the historiography of South Africa was provided to both the teachers and the learners to ensure an objective interpretation of the narrative of South African history.

Finally, the historical content knowledge of the Dutch Colonisation of the Cape in the 17th Century with special reference to slavery, as included in the hand-outs, was recapped, followed by an analysis and interpretation of the activities in the learner's books. After the learners had completed these activities (there were ten activities) in writing, the teachers facilitated a feedback and reflection session. The learners were also given an opportunity to improve their responses to the activities.

Second two lessons: The fieldtrips to the Elim Moravian Mission Town

In the second two lessons, the two fieldtrips, the learners' were engaged in field work, which was a continuation of the activities of the first two lessons. The purpose of the fieldtrips was twofold, namely to stimulate the learners' interest in history with special reference to their local history, and to develop their knowledge and understanding of how historians construct historical narratives. Four historical sites had been visited which included the:

- slave monument. The first slave monument in South Africa was built at the Elim Moravian Mission Station in 1938, almost a century after the emancipation of the slaves. The purpose of the slave monument was to commemorate the emancipation of the slaves on 1 December 1834, and in memory of the emancipated slaves who found refuge at Elim.
- Elim Moravian Church. The Elim Moravian Church is one of the oldest buildings in the region and was built in 1835. Following the emancipation of the slaves, many of them were left destitute by their former masters, and found refuge at the mission station. Here they were baptised and their names were changed. Each family was also given two plots to build their homes on and to cultivate a garden. A start off subsidy was also provided.
- German cemetery and graves. The latter contained the remains of many of the

early German inhabitants of the Elim Moravian Mission Town.

- Museum building. The old Mission shop has been converted into a museum, and was filled with primary and secondary sources portraying the community's history (South African Tourism Information, 2014: <http://www.southafrica.net/za/en/articles/entry/article-southafrica.net-elim-moravian-miss...>).

The learners had to collect and note the information pertaining to the origins of the above material sources and relics created by the early inhabitants of the village.

The first fieldtrip was organised to give the learners a general feeling of participation in an authentic historical experience and to introduce them to the activities of historians. The learners were involved in the observation of all the available material sources and relics, with the intention of identifying the type of source, writing down the name of the source, and taking informal notes of the displayed onsite information (mainly on the monuments) while they were moving through the village. During the second fieldtrip, the learners were involved in more formalised activities. They were asked to produce narratives similar to those being produced by historians. They were also requested to become more involved in the interrogation and closer investigation of the identified material sources and relics and an intensive identification of the applicable information.

The photographic evidence below represents the monuments and the learner activities (note taking and questioning of the material sources and relics) during the fieldtrips to the historical mission town of Elim. The photographic evidence is labelled as Images 1 to 7.

Image 1 (below) portrays the Elim Moravian Mission Town through which the learners strolled during the first exploratory field trip.

Image 1: The Elim Moravian Mission Town



Source: South African Tourism Information, ca. 2014.

Image 2 (below) contains the slave monument which was erected to commemorate the emancipation of the slaves in the Cape Colony on 1 December 1834. As a result, the slaves moved into various parts of the Western Cape. Many of these slaves (approximately 350) were accommodated in the Elim Moravian Mission Town and contributed to the development of the town.

Image 2: Slave monument



Source: Clarence Visagie, Elim Primary School, ca. 2014.

Images 3 and 4 (below) illustrate how the learners of the Elim Primary School completed the worksheets in front of the slave monument.

Image 3: Learners completing the worksheets in front of the slave monument



Source: Clarence Visagie, Elim Primary School, ca. 2014.

Image 4: Learners writing down and discussing the information on the slave monument



Source: Clarence Visagie, Elim Primary School, ca. 2014.

Images 5, 6 and 7 (below) are representing the following: the original Moravian church building erected in 1835 by the Moravian Missionaries in the village of Elim, a grave of an early German inhabitant of the village in the German cemetery, and the learners of the Elim Primary School as young historians collecting primary data in the German cemetery.

Image 5: The Church building erected in Elim village in 1835



Source: Clarence Visagie, Elim Primary School.

Image 6: A grave of the early Second War War years in the German cemetery



Source: Clarence Visagie, Elim Primary School.

Image 7: The young historians of Elim collecting information in the German cemetery



Source: Clarence Visagie, Elim Primary School, ca. 2014.

Feedback, reflection and assessment: Returning to the classroom

After the conclusion of the two field trips, and once back in their classrooms, the learners were requested to complete a number of historical interpretation activities using the information collected from the material sources or relics, followed by peer group discussions of the collected information. The series of lessons were concluded with the writing of individual short explanatory essays using the information that was gathered by the various groups. The learners were also encouraged to use their imagination. They had to imagine that they were one of the slaves who were emancipated in 1834, and who had moved to the Elim Mission Station for refuge, and who received two plots, one to build a home on and another one to cultivate as a garden. They were also asked to explain what they did with the start off subsidy. Finally, they had to indicate their role in and contribution to the development of the Moravian Mission Station.

The assessment procedures for the activities were informal and formal. The informal assessment focused on the learners' involvement in the fieldtrips, their understanding of the number of historical interpretation activities using the material sources or relics, and their personal experience with the local history of the region. The formal assessment included the completed worksheets and the short explanatory essay which were used to assess the learners' knowledge, skills and understanding of how historians construct historical narratives from written and material sources and relics.

Conclusion

This article was an attempt to demonstrate how the Social Sciences teachers of the Elim Primary School, a remote primary school in the Overberg region of the Western Cape, designed a series of local history lessons to implement some of the specific aims of the CAPS document. As an enrichment lesson, with as topic Heritage: The Elim Village – past and present, the purpose of the series of hands-on lessons was to grow the learners' interest in local history and improve their historical consciousness and historical conceptual and contextual knowledge and understanding of the region. As the multiple intelligences of the learners' were taken into consideration by the Social Sciences teachers during the design and implementation of the lessons, the constructivist approach and parallel teaching method were applied. Finally, it is envisaged that the results of this local history case study may also inspire other Social Sciences teachers in South Africa and beyond to replicate the outlined local history teaching strategy in their classrooms.

References

- Bernstein, B 1999. Vertical and horizontal discourse: An essay. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 20(2):157-173.
- Bertram, C 2008. "Doing history?": Assessment in history classrooms at a time of curriculum reform. *Journal of Education*, 45:155-177.
- Bromley, DW 1990. Academic contribution to psychological counselling: A philosophy of science for the study of individual cases. *Counselling Psychology Quarterly*, 3(3):299-307.
- Cresswell, JW 1997. *Qualitative inquiry and research designs: choosing among five traditions*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Dauids, N 2013. "Can Foucault come to the rescue?" From Dogma to Discourse: Deconstructing the History of Education for democratic subjects, *Yesterday&Today*, 9:1-09-124.
- Departement van Basiese Onderwys 2011. Nasionale Kurrikulumverklaring (NKV). *Kurrikulum- en assesseringsbeleidsverklaring. (CAPS). Senior fase: Graad 7-9. Sosiale Wetenskappe*. Kaapstad: Departement van Basiese Onderwys.
- Earle, J, Keats, G, Clacherty, A, Roberts, B, Thraves, P and Doubell, S, 2013. *Sosiale Wetenskappe Vandag: Graad 8 Leerdersboek*. Kaapstad: Maskew Miller Longman.

- Fines, J 1994. *Teaching History*. Edinburgh: Holmes McDougall.
- Maree, K (ed.), Creswell, JW, Ebersohn, I, Ferreira, R, Ivankova, NV, Jansen, JD, Niewenhuis, J, Pietersen, J, Plano Clark, VL, and Van der Westhuisen, C 2012. *First steps in research*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.
- Matthews, J, Moodley, K, Rheeder, W and Wilkinson, M. 1992. *Discover history: A pupil-centred approach to history method*. Cape Town: Maskew Miller Longman.
- Sauvin, P 1998. *Skills for standard grade history*. Cheltenham: Stanley Thornes.
- South African Tourism Information. 2014. *Elim Moravian Mission Town*. Available at: <http://www.southafrica.net/za/en/articles/entry/article-southafrica.net-elim-moravian-miss...> (Accessed on 25 June 2014).
- Van Eeden, ES 2012. Regional, local, urban and rural history as nearby spaces and places: Historiographical and methodological reflections towards modern day practice, *Special Edition, New Contree*, 63, January 2012. Available at: <http://dspace.nwu.ac.za/handle/10394/4969:1-33>.
- Van Eeden, ES 2010. "Exploring local histories in the use and appreciation of Heritage and History in history curricula", *Yesterday&Today*, 5, October 2010. Available at: scielo.org.za:23-50.
- Visagie, C 2013. *Personal experience*. Elim Primary School. April to June.
- Visagie, C 2014. *Personal experience*. History and geography of Elim Mission Town.
- Warnich, P and Meyer, L 2013. Trainee teachers' observation of learner-centred instruction and assessment as applied by History and Social Science teachers. *Yesterday&Today*, 9:13-44.