

Schooling in the early Orange Free State: Inception to Union, 1836 to 1910

Cheryl S le Roux
College of Education
University of South Africa
lrouxcs@unisa.ac.za

Abstract

Schooling is generally affected by prevailing social, political and ideological trends. In this article, the provision of schooling for European children, mainly of Dutch Voortrekker descent, is examined through the years of settlement in the mid-1830s to the time of South Africa becoming a Union in 1910. This era spans four distinctive political periods, namely, the Voortrekker period and the Orange River Sovereignty under British rule (1836-1854), the independent Orange Free State Republic (1854-1900), the period of the Anglo-Boer War (also referred to as the South African War) when the region was under British Military and Crown rule (1899-1902), and the Orange River Colony under responsible government (1902-1910). The article traces the role played by the community and parents, the church and the state interchangeably or conjointly in the schooling of the youth, as well as the place of language and religion in education. It is deduced that the complex social, political, ideological and economic factors associated with the provisioning of schooling and the pivotal issues of language, religion and funding remain prime issues in multilingual and multicultural contexts. It is concluded that these issues that the Orange Free State schooling system contended with were but precursors to that which followed many years later in modern South African society, where education is currently in turmoil due to factors such as the language of instruction, cultural legacies and inequalities and funding issues.

Keywords: Schooling in the early Orange Free State Republic; Concentration camp schools; Language in education; Christian National Education; Religious instruction in education; Education in the Orange Free State Republic.

Introduction and context

Since European settlement in the Cape in the mid-1600s, parents, the community, the church and the state interchangeably and conjointly played a part in providing schooling and education. The early Dutch settlers were

predominantly Protestant Calvinists,¹ and the prime objective of schooling was qualification for church membership (confirmation), generally by the age of 13.² This required a measure of literacy, such as being able to read the Bible, recite the Catechisms and write one's name.³ Devout Dutch parents endorsed the Biblically founded obligation to educate their children⁴ – duties which were supported by the precepts of the Baptismal vow contained in the Canons of Dort which required parents to bring up their children in the knowledge and ways of God.

Then again, the church acted in response to Article 21 of the Synod of Dordrecht (1618-1619) which dictated that children should be taught to read and write and to be instructed in the Catechisms by *goede Schoolmeesters* [good schoolmasters] under the direction of the Church Council.⁵ This outlook was aligned with the prevailing circumstances on the European continent. Since there was no established church in the Cape between 1652 and 1665, religious and educational matters resorted under the Governor and the Council of Policy.⁶ Hereby a tradition of state involvement in schooling was introduced.

In 1795 the Cape, which had hitherto been governed by the Dutch East Indian Company (DEIC) under the Dutch, came under British occupation as a result of the Napoleonic Wars between the Netherlands and France. The British held the Cape until 1803 when the region again came under Dutch (Batavian) rule as a result of the general truce negotiated in Europe. However, when the truce collapsed, the British again took possession of the Cape in 1806 and the Cape became a fully-fledged British colony. The Cape was thus alternatively subjected to governance by two significant European powers, the Dutch and the British, who both influenced the nature of the culture of this fledgling society.

Many of the Dutch people were disenchanted with British rule, and in the early 1800s a significant contingent of Dutch-speaking Cape colonists migrated to the interior of the country in search of a territory where they could be free and independent of British control. This major exodus – the Great Trek

1 A Kuyper (translated and prefaced by AE Fletcher), *The South African crisis* (London, Stop the War Committee, 1900), p. 11.

2 ME McKerron, *A history of education in South Africa (1652-1932)* (Pretoria, Van Schaik, 1934), p. 60.

3 AL Behr, *Education in South Africa: Origins, issues and trends: 1652-1988* (Pretoria, Academia, 1988), p. 88.

4 Compare Ephesians 6:4.

5 JD Vorster, *Die kerkregtelike ontwikkeling van die Kaapse kerk onder die Companjie: 1652-1795* (Cape Town, NG Kerk-Uitgewers, 1981), p. 105.

6 JD Vorster, *Die kerkregtelike ontwikkeling van die Kaapse kerk...*, p. 38.

– was under the leadership, primarily, of Piet Retief, Andries Pretorius, Louis Trichardt, Hans van Rensburg and A Hendrik Potgieter. The Voortrekkers, as the migrants were known, moved into Natal, the Orange River territory and what was eventually to be known as the South African Republic (ZAR).⁷ By 1847, an estimated 2 000 families were living in the Orange Free State and a *Boeren Maatschappij* (Boer Community) was established as a form of government.⁸ However, the Voortrekkers had hardly settled themselves, when Sir Harry Smith annexed the region to the British Crown in 1848 and the ideal of establishing an independent Boer Republic was thwarted. The region was proclaimed a Crown possession and named the Orange River Sovereignty (ORS). Six years later, in 1854, Britain ceded the Sovereignty to the burghers – an act validated by the Bloemfontein Convention. Consequently, the people occupying the region between the Orange and Vaal rivers regained their independence. The Republic of the Orange Free State (OFS) was established with Josias Philip Hoffman as president (1854-1855). A *Volksraad* (House of Assembly) was elected and a Constitution drafted.⁹

During the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902, the OFS joined forces with the ZAR and, consequently, the OFS was annexed by Britain in 1900 and renamed the Orange River Colony (ORC). The period of Crown Colony Government ended in 1907 when a system of responsible government was established under the premiership of the Hon. A Fischer – a situation which remained until Union in 1910.¹⁰

In light of the above, events in the early Free State spanned four distinctive political periods, namely:

- 1836–1854 – The Voortrekkers and the ORS under British rule;
- 1854–1900 – the independent Republic of the OFS;
- 1900–1907 – the Anglo-Boer War and the ORC under British Military and Crown rule; and
- 1907–1910 – the ORC under responsible government.

The aim of this article is to outline how schooling for European children of the predominantly Dutch Voortrekkers was provided during these periods. Ultimately, in this endeavour, light will be shed on those directing education,

7 GM Theal, *History of South Africa after 1795, Volume IV* (Cape Town, Struik, 1964), pp. 277, 467.

8 KJ Kok, *Empires of the veld* (Cape Town, Juta, 1904), p. 1.

9 GM Theal, *History of South Africa after 1795...*, p. 316.

10 GW Eybers, *Selected constitutional documents illustrating South African history 1795-1910* (London, Routledge, 1918), p. xvii.

as well as the main decision makers and role players – parents (community), church and/or state – in this regard. The article will examine schooling prior to, and during the ORS and the role and attitude of the main role players in relation to the provision of schooling. This section will be followed by an examination of the role of the district school commissions established by the *Volksraad* in 1855 and the regulations for the management of schooling in the OFS Republic. The impact of the Anglo-Boer War/South African War on education and the establishment of the concentration camp schools will also be explored. Education legislation embodied in the Public Education Ordinance of 1903, Christian National Education (CNE) and negotiations and agreements regarding education legislation of 1905 will be considered. The review will close with an analysis of schooling under the responsible government. Throughout this discussion, the position and role of parents as members of the community, as well as those of the church and the state, will be investigated to establish where the duty of providing schooling presumably lay.

Schooling and education prior to and during the Orange River Sovereignty

On arrival in the region in the mid-1830s, the Voortrekker immigrants first had to establish themselves in an undeveloped and inhospitable area. Most of their time and effort was taken up providing for their immediate physical needs with little attention being paid to formal education provisioning. What education there was, was limited to acquiring knowledge of the basic tenets of the Christian Protestant religion required to attain church membership. This was a primary parental responsibility invoked by the baptismal vow. Given the lack of any formal established church or state structure, parents alone took responsibility for their children's education.¹¹ However, there was a dire need for schooling and, in 1847, parents appealed to the Dutch Reformed Church in the Cape Colony for assistance. In response, the Synod, although the church had not sanctioned the emigration of Boers from the Cape Colony, nevertheless took it upon itself to minister to the religious and educational needs of its members north of the Cape Colony border. A commission consisting of Rev. Andrew Murray (Snr), PK Albertyn and two elders was then sent to determine what could be done to improve schooling in the territory.¹²

11 KJ Kok, *Empires of the veld...*, p. 85.

12 JPJ Bruwer, "Education in the Orange Free State: An historical survey and suggestions for further development"

The church subsequently appointed two teachers from the Netherlands – Jacobus Groenendaal and Joachim van der Meer – to teach in the towns of Fauresmith and Bloemfontein respectively. The Free State had been divided into four magisterial districts and, since only two teachers could be secured, they were assigned to the primary districts of Fauresmith and Bloemfontein. That the need for church intervention in religious and educational matters was immediate is attested to by Groenendaal who remarked: “*Ik heb nooit zoo iets gezien en dat bij menschen, verstoken van school en kerk.* [I have not yet seen such a state and that amongst people bereft of school and church]”.¹³ The request for teachers was made when the territory was under the authority of the *Boeren Maatschappij*, but the teachers only arrived after the region had been annexed by the British. Consequently, Sir Harry Smith insisted that both English and Dutch be taught in the schools where these teachers were to preside. Smith was also aware of the pressing need for schools and noted that the emigrant farmers were without any means of education.¹⁴

In 1849, a Dutch schoolmaster was appointed to each town that was a magistracy, namely, Bloemfontein, Smithfield, Winburg and Vrededorp. This was still not sufficient to address the need. Gerdener¹⁵ records a description of the prevailing schooling situation as described in an article in the *Friend* of July 1850 as: “*betreurenswaardig* [regrettable]”. The author of the article in the *Friend* attributed the dismal situation to the indifference of parents to education, but it was conceded that many of the inhabitants were unqualified to educate their children themselves, while others were unable to afford the personal services of a tutor. It needs to be remembered that the population was predominantly rural and that only a few of the children could benefit from the town schools. An itinerant system would have been a more practical solution given the expanse of the territory,¹⁶ but this proved unfeasible given the lack of qualified teachers who could have been appointed to undertake the task.

To improve schooling in the few town schools, a resolution was passed that masters and their schools were to be placed under the direction of a school commission. The precedent for such a measure was in all probability to be found

(D.Phil., UNISA, 1936), p. 8.

13 JJ Lubbe, *Lewensomstandighede en opvoeding van die Voortrekkerkind* (Bloemfontein, Nasionale Pers, 1942), p. 108.

14 JPJ Bruwer, “Education in the Orange Free State...” (D.Phil., UNISA, 1936), p. 18.

15 GBA Gerderner, *Boustowwe vir die geskiedenis van die Nederduits-Gereformeerde Kerk in die Transgariëp* (Cape Town, Nasionale Pers, 1930), p. 113.

16 GBA Gerderner, *Boustowwe vir die geskiedenis van die Nederduits-Gereformeerde Kerk...*, p. 111.

in the system of school committees established in Natal and the Cape Colony.¹⁷ The regulations of 1850 that ensued required teachers to be properly trained and bilingual, required that school fees be levied (however, indigent children were exempted from paying fees), that the schools be visited weekly by one or more commission members and that quarterly exams, under the supervision of the commission, be conducted.¹⁸ Later that year, the commissions were instructed to appoint three rural schoolmasters in each district.¹⁹ When the British ceded their rule in 1854, there were four operational village schools at Bloemfontein, Winburg, Harrismith and Fauresmith. The itinerant rural school system was in dire straits, since no schoolmasters had been appointed given the dearth of teachers.²⁰ Private itinerant teachers – often of dubious character and inadequately qualified – offered their services to farmers who, themselves generally uneducated, were unable to gauge their proficiency. The government’s attempt to induce qualified teachers to take up positions as itinerant teachers was also unsuccessful,²¹ given that there was a undersupply of suitably qualified teachers who could be considered for appointment.

A review of this period indicates that initially upon settlement in the region, education, apart from that required to attain church membership which was provided by parents, was neglected. Nearly a decade later, in 1847, the dire need for education was realised, and parents appealed to the Synod in the Cape Colony to procure teachers on their behalf. The church was sympathetic to these pleas for assistance and obtained two teachers from the Netherlands to teach in two of the magisterial districts of the Orange Free State. However, since the region had subsequently been annexed by the British, it was a requirement that both Dutch and English be taught in the schools. Attention needs to be drawn to the fact that the teachers were secured by the church, but that the nature of the education provided was prescribed by the state. Smith, realising the pressing need for education, appealed for more teachers to be appointed to the Free State. To improve the quality of the education being provided and to ensure that appropriately qualified teachers were employed, school commissions were appointed in 1850 to oversee education. When the region was ceded by the British to the people of the Free State, there were four functioning town schools, each under the jurisdiction of a school commission. Given that the Free State was predominantly rural, few

17 Watermeyer Commission, 1863, Appendix 1, p. 49.

18 JPJ Bruwer, “Education in the Orange Free State...” (D.Phil., UNISA, 1936), p. 27.

19 JPJ Bruwer, “Education in the Orange Free State...” (D.Phil., UNISA, 1936), p. 52.

20 JPJ Bruwer, “Education in the Orange Free State...” (D.Phil., UNISA, 1936), p. 53.

21 JPJ Bruwer, “Education in the Orange Free State...” (D.Phil., UNISA, 1936), pp. 52-53.

children attended these district town schools and there was a great need for itinerant teachers who were able and willing to teach children on the farms. Many of the teachers who served in this position were under-qualified since the parents, themselves generally poorly educated, were unable to verify the teachers' aptitude. Neither the church, nor the state was able to procure suitably qualified teachers to be appointed to teach in the rural areas; so, generally, education in the rural areas was in dire straits.

The provision of education during this period had thus passed from the initiative of the parents to the church and state, with the state taking the final responsibility, however, with input from the church and community in the form of the composition of the school commissions which oversaw education.

Schooling under the Republic of the Orange Free State

Within three weeks of the establishment of the Republic of the OFS in 1854, a *Volksraad* was formed and a Constitution adopted. According to Article 23 of the Constitution, the *Volksraad* was responsible for the furtherance of religion and education.²² However, the *Volksraad* had serious economic, political and Basuto issues to contend with and was unable to extend the provision of education beyond the schools that had already been established by the British, with assistance from the Dutch Reformed Church in the Cape Colony.²³ Nevertheless, parents remained anxious for the *Volksraad* to appoint teachers to their districts. On 9 September 1854, a prospective teacher from the Smithfield district approached the *Volksraad* to be appointed as an itinerant government schoolmaster. He submitted proof of his competence and testimonials vouching for his proficiency, as well as a petition signed by sixty residents of the district supporting his appointment. Around the same time, an itinerant teacher from the Modder River District, JS Higson, also requested a government appointment. His request was accompanied by a petition signed by several Bloemfontein residents asking that he, who was described as a "competent man", be appointed to a local school. These requests for appointment were tabled at the same *Volksraad* meeting. The *Volksraad* nevertheless, despite the testimonials submitted by parents and

22 Orange Free State, *The Constitution of the Orange Free State*, GW Eybers (ed.) *Selected constitutional documents illustrating South African history 1795-1910* (London, Routledge, 1854), pp. 285-296.

23 South African Archival Records, Cape Town, *Notule van die Volksraad van die Oranje-Vrystaat 1854-1857, Deel 1* (Parow, Cape Times, 1952), pp. 301-302.

community members, decided that they would initially not appoint these prospective teachers until a plan could be devised whereby these individuals could be appointed impartially.²⁴

The “plan” the *Volksraad* devised was the institution of local bodies – district school commissions – guaranteeing community involvement in educational matters. The prime responsibility of the commission would be to oversee teacher appointments.²⁵ In February 1855, district school commissions, comprising the district magistrate, the local clergyman, a community member elected by town residents and two members elected by district residents, were established to supervise schools and examine prospective teachers. Appointments were to be ratified by the commission.²⁶ Despite these provisions, rural areas remained destitute of education – a point that is attested to by the Rev. Andrew Murray who highlighted the crying need for teachers and more schooling facilities in the OFS. The *Volksraad* had appropriated salaries for 25 itinerant teachers; yet the money remained unused because teachers could not be secured.²⁷ Districts earnestly implored the *Volksraad* to use all available means to increase the education provided and to provide more clergymen to labour amongst them.²⁸ It is unclear whether these appeals were met.

In 1863, school regulations were promulgated which provided the first detailed guidelines regarding the financing of schools. The *Volksraad* undertook to donate grants to every village in the OFS from which it had received a memorandum requesting the establishment of a government school. The *Volksraad* expected the locals to take an interest in schooling, for it was required that subscribers to the list of individuals requesting a school should undertake to pay an annual subscription for three consecutive years, for which sum they would be allowed to send two children to school. People who had no children, but who wanted to be involved in the education of the local youth could also subscribe as honorary subscribers on the same basis.²⁹ The *Volksraad* stipulated that prospective teacher applicants were to provide testimonials testifying of their competence and moral character. Teachers were

24 South African Archival Records, Cape Town, *Notule van die Volksraad van die Oranje-Vrystaat...*, pp. 75, 128, 141, 156.

25 CS Le Roux, “A historical-educational appraisal of parental responsibilities and rights in formal education in South Africa (1652-1910)” (D.Ed., UNISA, 1999), p. 259.

26 South African Archival Records, Cape Town, *Notule van die Volksraad van die Oranje-Vrystaat...*, p. 99.

27 J du Plessis, *The life of Andrew Murray in South Africa* (London, Marshall Brothers, 1919), p. 189.

28 South African Archival Records, Cape Town, *Notule van die Volksraad van die Oranje-Vrystaat, 1854-1857, Deel 3* (Parow, Cape Times, 1958), p. 547.

29 Oranjevrijstaat, “Regulations for the efficient management of government village schools in the OFS”, JPJ Bruwer, “Education in the Orange Free State...” (D.Phil., UNISA, 1936), pp. 2; 4.

to commence and close each day with a prayer, provide a scripture reading and a sing a hymn. They were required to teach Bible history, to be bilingual (Dutch was the medium of instruction, but English was to be taught as a school subject), hold a biannual public examination at which each member of the school commission would have the right to question pupils on the work the teacher had covered during the year, and follow the method of teaching they considered to be best.³⁰

School commissions had the duty to select and appoint teachers (although appointments had to be ratified by the President), dismiss teachers in the event of immoral behaviour, incompetency, ill-treatment of children, subscribing to unorthodox religious principles and violating school regulations. The school commission was required to deal with the financial matters of the school and to submit an annual report to the government.³¹ The fact that the commission could dismiss a teacher for violation of the school regulations indicates that the commission would have needed to draft a comprehensive list of regulations defining the parameters of acceptable behaviour. Clear guidelines on language use and religious observance – probably the two most sensitive issues from parents' point of view – were provided, while the measure of liberty granted to teachers to choose the method of instruction they deemed best, could be termed enlightened.³²

However, despite these innovative measures, the provision of education remained problematic. When JH Brand became president in 1864, he undertook to establish the causes of the failure of schooling in search of ways to improve the situation. At his instigation, circulars were issued to clergymen and magistrates throughout the Republic to determine local community and church opinion on the needs and shortcomings of schooling.³³ This request for views on the matter did not go unheeded and in a memorandum to the President, dated 2 November 1865, community members requested that all potential teachers should be examined in terms of their character and teaching ability. It was suggested that not all individuals who presented themselves as potential teachers were suitably equipped for the task. The request ended by pointing out that: “*niet alle kokken die lange messen dragen...* [meaning

30 Oranjevrijstaat, “Regulations for the efficient management...”, JPJ Bruwer, “Education in the Orange Free State...” (D.Phil., UNISA, 1936), pp. 11–12; 18; 22-23.

31 Oranjevrijstaat, “Regulations for the efficient management...”, JPJ Bruwer, “Education in the Orange Free State...” (D.Phil., UNISA, 1936), pp. 7[1]-7[4]; 8.

32 JPJ Bruwer, “Education in the Orange Free State...” (D.Phil., UNISA, 1936), pp. 338-341.

33 EG Malherbe, *Education in South Africa (1652-1922)* (Cape Town, Juta, 1925), pp. 358-359.

that appearances can be misleading]”.³⁴ The Reverend Du Toit of Jacobsdal commented in his memorandum to the President in 1866 that it could not be denied that the state of education was: “*zeer armoedig* [very poor]”. He indicated that several of the itinerant Boer teachers: “*zelven ter naauwernood kunnen schryven* [were hardly literate themselves]”; yet, they were availing themselves to teach.³⁵

In response to the comments received, President Brand recommended that a school should be founded in each established town and that suitable government teachers who were proficient in English and Dutch, should be secured to teach in these schools. Furthermore, the different communities and parishes would be expected to contribute to the upkeep of these teachers.³⁶

When discussing the schooling situation, the question of who was primarily responsible, was invariably raised: was it the state, the church or the parents who were responsible, or was it a combination of role players? With regard to this issue, the OFS Dutch Reformed Synod, in addressing the *Volksraad*, pointed out that it was the *Volksraad's* primary responsibility, but also acceded that the church shared the responsibility.³⁷ The Synod subsequently appointed a commission to enquire into the state of education. In May 1869, the commission reported to Brand that communities, including the clergy, should be encouraged to show more interest in education as it appeared that there was a general sense of apathy amongst these roleplayers in education. It was also proposed that the President should award a £30 grant for itinerant teachers upon receipt of a letter of recommendation and confirmation that a minimum of 15 children would receive instruction. The commission highlighted the necessity of visiting schools regularly to check on teacher and student performance.³⁸

The idea of local involvement in schooling was not new. During the pioneering days and in the years before the first government teachers were appointed, parents had, in the event of their being unable to undertake for their children's education themselves, engaged a private tutor from the community. This practice remained operative, especially in the rural areas where itinerant teachers found employment. In 1855, the *Volksraad* provided

34 GBA Gerderner, *Boustowwe vir die geskiedenis van die Nederduits-Gereformeerde Kerk...*, p. 163.

35 GBA Gerderner, *Boustowwe vir die geskiedenis van die Nederduits-Gereformeerde Kerk...*, p. 168.

36 GBA Gerderner, *Boustowwe vir die geskiedenis van die Nederduits-Gereformeerde Kerk...*, p. 169.

37 GBA Gerderner, *Boustowwe vir die geskiedenis van die Nederduits-Gereformeerde Kerk...*, p. 177.

38 GBA Gerderner, *Boustowwe vir die geskiedenis van die Nederduits-Gereformeerde Kerk...*, p. 176.

for the establishment of district school committees (who were represented by the clergy and members of the local town and district community), whose responsibility it was to select and recommend teachers for their districts. In addition, the community was given the right to decide on the language and medium of instruction. Yet, despite the opportunity for church, community and state contribution and involvement in schooling, schooling facilities were inadequate to meet the needs of the youth and the educational prospects of many children remained dismal.

The *Volksraad* takes responsibility for education in the Republic of the Orange Free State

Year after year the *Volksraad* discussed the subject of education, but the matter remained unattended to. In his opening address at the 1871 session of the *Volksraad*, President Brand openly reproached the *Volksraad* for having fruitlessly discussed and procrastinated action on such an important issue as the schooling of the State's youth. He noted that the majority of the Free State children were growing up without any schooling whatsoever. He suggested the immediate framing of an education law, together with a scheme of taxation to support the financing of education. The outcome was Ordinance No. 5, 1872³⁹ which placed the *Volksraad* at the head of education and provided for the establishment of local school committees, the regulation of courses of instruction and a framework for teachers' duties.⁴⁰ The Ordinance remained in abeyance, however, until the beginning of 1874 when Dr John Brebner assumed duty as Inspector of Schools and the Ordinance became education law.⁴¹

The Brebner era (1874-1899)

Brebner first undertook an extensive reconnaissance tour of the country to establish the state of schooling and to gauge burghers' views on education. He found the villages to be very small – some consisting of no more than twelve or fourteen houses – and far apart. The children who were in need

39 JPJ Bruwer, "Education in the Orange Free State..." (D.Phil., UNISA, 1936), p. 14.

40 EG Malherbe, *Education in South Africa...*, pp. 358-360.

41 EG Malherbe, *Education in South Africa...*, p. 362.

of education were generally scattered on isolated farms beyond the reach of these village schools. Schools remained irregularly attended and many existed only for the purpose of preparing children for confirmation. Brebner further found that the issue of language, as well as religious instruction, remained controversial within local communities. Brebner also believed that it was pointless to merely appoint school committees; the members needed to be instructed in their duties and guided to understand the intricacies of education legislation if they were to function effectively.⁴² Brebner recommended to the *Volksraad* that a new education ordinance be promulgated and *Ordonnantie No. 1, 1874, Ordonnantie op het Openbaar Onderwijs voor Blanke Kinderen in den Oranjevrijstaat* [Ordinance for the Public Education of White children in the Orange Free State] was forthcoming.⁴³ This legislation remained the basis of future legislation for white children under republican government and was only later amended regarding details in matters of finance and the method of electing school committees. Matters of particular note in this legislation were that teachers were required to be members of the Protestant religion, had to have testimonials of good conduct, had to have a sound knowledge of and offer instruction in Dutch and English, were to provide non-denominational religious instruction and keep records and provide the school commission with the names of recalcitrant pupils. The school commission comprised the local magistrate, the minister of the Dutch Reformed Church and three resident members – indicating state, church and parental or community involvement in education and the provisioning thereof. The commission had the duty to appoint or dismiss teachers, investigate grievances brought forward with regard to education, and have joint supervisory rights over town, farm and itinerant schools which they were required to inspect once a month. The commission was to report parents' grievances and any issues affecting or compromising the efficiency of the school to the inspector.⁴⁴

Brebner had done much to set education on a firmer footing and worked tirelessly towards this goal. During his term of office, the number of government schools increased from 10 to 179 and the number of pupils from 348 to 7390.⁴⁵ In addition, the number of itinerant schools servicing

42 J Brebner, *Memoir of the life and work of Rev. John Brebner* (Edinburgh, Lorimer & Chalmers, 1903), p. 57.

43 Pretoria, Oranjevrijstaat, *Ordonnantie op het openbaar onderwijs voor blanke kinderen in den Oranjevrijstaat, Ordonnantie No. 1* (no place or publisher, 1874).

44 Oranjevrijstaat, *Ordonnantie op het openbaar onderwijs...*, II, pp. 8, 10-11; 15-18; 20-22; III pp. 2; 4-5; 7-8; 12.

45 Oranjevrijstaat, *Verslag van den staat van het openbaar onderwijs in den Oranjevrijstaat* (Bloemfontein, Borckenhagen, 1878).

rural areas increased from 28 to 144 by 1898,⁴⁶ but although there was improvement, the situation remained unsatisfactory for want of suitable buildings, qualified teachers and the cooperation of the local community to arrange schooling. School attendance remained poor and teachers often complained that parents were neglectful and kept their children from school to help on the farms. Certain parents also apparently believed that after a few months of schooling their children were sufficiently educated and withdrew them from the schools. Seemingly, parents still thought of schooling only in terms of preparing their children for church membership. Furthermore, it would appear that a broader education was frowned upon by certain parents, for it is on record that, in one instance, a teacher was prohibited by the parents of children attending the school where she taught from teaching geography and other subjects. The complainants also indicated that only the Bible and the Children's Bible should be used for instruction.⁴⁷ Brebner also commented on this situation, saying that government schools could not be used for the purpose of preparing children for confirmation only, despite many parents' desire for this. Schools which served this purpose only would never completely meet the requirements of education and the preference for private schools would remain for parents who wanted a broad education for their children.⁴⁸ Brebner further blamed the inability of the government school system to progress on community apathy. He commented that in the prevailing circumstances, the present education system more than adequately provided the community – especially in rural areas – with an affordable and ample system of education. The community was invited to contribute their own efforts and support to improve the provisioning of education if they were dissatisfied with what the government could offer. Brebner made it clear that it wasn't government support that was lacking, but community cooperation and interest in bringing the system into fruition. In his opinion, the success of the education system depended solely on the zeal and support of the community and the ordinance was so constructed that: “*het initiatief altijd bij de burgers zelve berust* [the initiative resided exclusively with the community]”.⁴⁹

From the annual reports submitted by the school commissions it became apparent that some school commissions were indifferent to the needs of the community and its school and, consequently, several of these schools

46 Oranjevrijstaat, *Verslag van den staat van het openbaar onderwijs...*, pp. 1, 13.

47 Oranjevrijstaat, *Verslag van den staat van het openbaar onderwijs...*, p. 20.

48 Oranjevrijstaat, *Verslag van den staat van het openbaar onderwijs...*, p. 1.

49 Oranjevrijstaat, *Verslag van den staat van het openbaar onderwijs...*, p. 15.

eventually closed due to a lack of interest and support. However, some school commissions did much to promote education. Instances of fundraising attempts through holding bazaars or organising school concerts are mentioned in the reports and such schools were commended as being: “*eene zeer goede school* [a very good school]”.⁵⁰

With regard to the language issue, various stances were adopted. Some schools were divided into English and Dutch classes – a situation which was an upshot of Sir Harry Smith’s directive when the Free State was under British rule – while others offered instruction only in Dutch, or only in English. The latter occurrence is of note since, although the cultural set-up was predominantly Dutch, some schools were notorious for the neglect of teaching Dutch.⁵¹ Some teachers remarked that parents objected to instruction in Dutch, with the result that tuition was primarily in English.⁵² However, other schools provided instruction in Dutch only.⁵³ The medium of instruction was probably less determined by legislation than by the teacher’s ability to teach the required languages and parents’ choice regarding the medium of instruction. A further argument which could be put forward was that the local language, Afrikaans, was evolving from Dutch and that the Dutch used in schools was perceived to be archaic in relation to the language spoken in the community. English could possibly have been perceived to have been a more stable language and hence the preference for English as the language of instruction.

Brebner remained a vigorous advocate for compulsory education, with this goal being achieved in 1895 when Act No. 14 was passed.⁵⁴ However, Brebner’s desire to see continued progress in education provisioning had to be postponed, for the OFS, in alliance with the Transvaal, was preparing for war against England.

Schooling under British rule: The Orange River Colony

When the Anglo Boer War (also known as the South African War) broke out in October 1899, organised education in the OFS virtually came to an

50 Oranjevrijstaat, *Verslag van den staat van het openbaar onderwijs...*, p. 37.

51 Oranjevrijstaat, *Verslag van den staat van het openbaar onderwijs...*, pp. 18, 42.

52 Oranjevrijstaat, *Verslag van den staat van het openbaar onderwijs...*, p. 21.

53 Oranjevrijstaat, *Verslag van den staat van het openbaar onderwijs...*, p. 16.

54 Oranjevrijstaat, *Verslag van den staat van het openbaar onderwijs...*, p. 23.

end.⁵⁵ First refugee and then concentration camps were established to house the women, children and the elderly, since many of the farms were razed in keeping with Lord Roberts's and Lord Kitchener's "scorched earth" policy. It was important to the burghers that their children's education was sustained, especially with an eye to confirmation, and a number of private schools run by former teachers were established in the concentration camps. Tuition was provided at a fee. However, since many of the internees were destitute, these schools were poorly attended.⁵⁶ Nonetheless, the detainees were generally eager to attend school, since this offered an opportunity to be gainfully occupied. Camp life was dreary and attending school broke the monotony. When the British authorities and the British War Office in London became aware of the eagerness of the burghers for their children to attend school, the opportunity to inculcate British values through schooling and thus to Anglicise the Boer youth was seized. Soon a number of English schools under the auspices of the district commission were established in all fifteen Free State concentration camps.⁵⁷ These schools quickly outnumbered and became more popular than the private Dutch camp schools, probably due to the perception that better schooling was offered by better qualified teachers. Soon twenty-six British schools with a teaching corps of sixty-six teachers were established in the Free State camps. Teaching was in English, but religious instruction and Dutch language teaching were in Dutch to secure parents' approval. Religious instruction in Dutch would facilitate preparation for church membership, and the provision for Dutch language teaching would please the Dutch refugees and inmates and assure them that their language was not being neglected. Attempts were made to ensure that the schooling provided was attractive to the inmates of the camps. Teachers were either local or sourced from the Cape Colony. In time, teachers from England, Scotland and the British colonies were active in these schools, ensuring a strong British presence and influence. These staffing measures were closely aligned with the Anglicisation policy which had been embarked on.⁵⁸

Joseph Chamberlain, through Lord Milner, saw the importance of placing the concentration camps schools under central administration, for it is said that he had a set goal in mind: Pupils had to understand their position as

55 JC Otto, *Die konsentrasie-kampe* (Kaapstad, Nasionale Boekhandel, 1954), p. 151.

56 JPJ Bruwer, "Education in the Orange Free State..." (D.Phil., UNISA, 1936), pp. 121-125.

57 Great Britain, *Concentration Camp Commission. Report on the concentration camps in South Africa by the Committee of Ladies appointed by the Secretary of State of War* (London, Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1902), pp. 5, 39.

58 JC Otto, *Die konsentrasie-kampe...*, p. 152.

British subjects under British rule.⁵⁹ Milner thus requested EB Sargent, a colonial administrator with an interest in education, to serve as the Director of Education.

The Sargent era of education and the Anglicisation drive

Sargent commenced his work as an agent to Anglicise young minds in earnest at the Norvalspont camp. The camp commandant, Captain Du Plat Taylor, supported Sargent's efforts and two marquees were made available for the school. Parents were also anxious for their children's schooling to be continued, since the education provided also ensured that the youth were prepared for confirmation. This practice garnered support amongst the burghers for the schools provided by the British. Soon the school comprised 800 children taught by thirteen teaching staff.⁶⁰ Sargent commented in a memo to Milner in February 1901 as follows:⁶¹

Our military policy has gathered the greater part of the child population into these camps and I feel that the opportunity during the next year of getting them to speak English is golden.

The youth were to learn English and British value systems. Sargent reported that there was: "a genuine eagerness to acquire our language".⁶² Subjects that were taught in these schools were arithmetic, the reading and writing of English, religious instruction and Dutch language in Dutch, singing and physical training.⁶³ However, all schools devoted most of the teaching time to English as a subject and at the inspectors' conference in March 1902, it was noted:⁶⁴

It appeared that all the inspectors classified the children primarily in respect of their knowledge of English... The director said that he wished an examination of the children as to proficiency in English in the first place and as to proficiency in other subjects in the second place to be held during the ensuing term.

59 JC Otto, *Die konsentrasie-kampe...*, p. 153.

60 Great Britain, *Concentration Camp Commission...*, p. 49.

61 JC Otto, *Die konsentrasie-kampe...*, p. 154.

62 JC Otto, *Die konsentrasie-kampe...*, p. 155.

63 JC Otto, *Die konsentrasie-kampe...*, p. 156.

64 JC Otto, *Die konsentrasie-kampe...*, p. 157.

The British schools in the concentration camps were popular and Sargant struggled to find suitable buildings to accommodate all the children who wanted to attend school. Resources were also hard to come by. Some schools lacked textbooks and teachers resorted to teaching orally, using only blackboards and picture charts as resources. To relieve the lack of stationery, writing slates and slate pencils were used. Desks were generally unobtainable and children sat on crates and, in some instances, the children: “came daily carrying little pads which they place upon some large stones to form their seats”.⁶⁵ Despite these hardships, the number of pupils in the concentration camp schools increased from 1 370 in April 1901 to 12 066 in May 1902.⁶⁶

Finding suitably qualified teachers was another difficulty and, initially, teachers were identified from amongst the camp inmates or nearby towns. Once the schools had been established, a qualified teacher from England or one of the British colonies generally took over as the teacher in a bid to reinforce the Anglicization process. Several of the local teachers only had a rudimentary knowledge of English and this was a significant stumbling block in Sargant’s Anglicisation project. Millicent Fawcett’s Lady’s Committee, which inspected the concentration camps to establish what the prevailing conditions and circumstances were, made constant reference to local teachers’ inability to speak proper English. This shortcoming was also noted by Emily Hobhouse during her inspection of concentration camp circumstances. In this regard, Dr Franks, a medical inspector also commented in November 1901:⁶⁷

I think the headmaster of all the schools in the burgher camps should be a loyal Britisher and if possible at least half of his assistants should be the same.

Sargant supported this notion, commenting that it was important to secure the services of headmasters who were able to win over the young generation of Dutch Afrikaner to: “English ways of thought and speech and English ideas of truthfulness and loyalty”.⁶⁸

Milner was especially impressed by Sargant’s thoughts on this matter and commented that the camp schools offered an unequalled opportunity to influence the Dutch Afrikaner youth in such a way that harmony among the Dutch and British could be secured in the future.⁶⁹

65 JC Otto, *Die konsentrasie-kampe...*, p. 160.

66 JC Otto, *Die konsentrasie-kampe...*, p. 161.

67 JC Otto, *Die konsentrasie-kampe...*, p. 163.

68 JC Otto, *Die konsentrasie-kampe...*, p. 164.

69 JC Otto, *Die konsentrasie-kampe...*, p. 163.

The issue of English as medium of instruction, as proposed by Sargant, was discussed at length in the British House of Commons. Humphreys-Owen, a member of the Liberal Opposition, pointed out that mother-tongue instruction had definite advantages, as had been proven in Wales where children had also, similar to the Boer children, been subjected to instruction in a language other than their mother tongue and had struggled with their learning. However, Chamberlain defended the situation in South Africa as being vastly different and noted: ⁷⁰

Many Boer children understand as little Dutch as they do English, and speak only the Taal and that many parents prefer the instruction to be given in English as the language which will most induce to the material benefits of their children.

Sargant pursued the Anglicisation drive and recruited teachers from England, Scotland and the United States of America, as well as the British colonies of Canada, Australia and New Zealand to teach in the understaffed concentration camp schools. By July 1903 (after the cessation of hostilities), close on 500 of the 1 306 teachers were foreigners from the Colonies or from Scotland. Sargant was anxious that these teachers would be made to feel at home and exhorted the local staff to welcome the foreigners with the hospitality: “characteristic of the Dutch race and of South Africa”.⁷¹ Foreign teachers were expected to learn as much of the local language as possible to enable them: “to unlock the hearts of those with whom they have thrown in their lot” and to teach without their work being hindered.⁷²

The Anglicisation project did not reach full fruition owing to the brevity of its existence. When peace was signed on 31 May 1902, those burghers who could, returned to their farms to rebuild their lives. Parents were induced by the British authorities to leave their children in school – they would be accommodated in camp hostels – but this arrangement was rejected and increasingly the number of children attending the camp schools dwindled. The last camp school was closed in December 1902.

In the aftermath of the war, it became necessary to re-establish education on a more secure footing. Steps taken in this regard culminated in the passing of an ordinance, directed at the provision of public education for white children. With the relaxation of military rule, a new education policy was established

⁷⁰ JC Otto, *Die konsentrasie-kampe...*, p. 164.

⁷¹ Great Britain, *Concentration Camp Commission...*, pp. 77-79.

⁷² JC Otto, *Die konsentrasie-kampe...*, p. 166.

to develop a free, non-denominational and non-compulsory system of government schools. *Public Education Ordinance No. 27, 1903* provided for the establishment of a Department of Public Education under the Director of Education.⁷³ Schools were open to children of all denominations, although parents could withdraw their children from religious instruction classes or from any religious observance if desired as per the “conscience clause”.⁷⁴ The Ordinance provided for the establishment of school committees, but parents were concerned about these committees’ powers and lobbied the government to ensure that committees guaranteed that five hours per week were allowed for the teaching of Dutch, and that religious instruction was non-doctrinal.⁷⁵ Towards the end of 1903, after the Dutch Reformed Church and concerned parents had failed to obtain the concessions for which it had appealed, it decided to start independent CNE schools designed to preserve the chief features of the republican government schools. These schools provided for that which was most dear to the Afrikaner tradition – their religion and language.⁷⁶

In September 1904 the Moderator of the Dutch Reformed Church called a meeting with the Crown government. The injunctions focused on increased powers for school committees, additional time for teaching Dutch and for non-denominational religious instruction in government schools. An agreement was reached and the CNE schools amalgamated with the government schools.⁷⁷ The result of this agreement was embodied in new education legislation passed in 1905.⁷⁸ The general gist of the legislation was that all government primary schools would be free and open to European children, attendance was compulsory for children between the ages of 10 and 16 and any scholar could, at the request of the parent or guardian, receive tuition in the Dutch language. English would be the medium of instruction, but the time devoted to the tuition of both languages as subjects would be equal. Religious instruction could be taught in Dutch and denominational instruction could be given with the school committee’s approval after set school hours. In 1906, Director of Education, Hugh Gunn, reported that the school committees had generally taken a deep interest in their work and had been of

73 Orange River Colony, *Public Education Ordinance No. 27, 1903* (without place or publisher, 1903), p. 1a.

74 Orange River Colony, *Public Education Ordinance...*, Appendix X, p. 1.

75 Transvaal and Orange River Colony, *Report of the Director of Education for the period November 1900 to February 1904* (Johannesburg, Esson & Perkins, 1904), Appendix XXVIII.

76 Transvaal and Orange River Colony, *Report of the Director of Education...*, p 37.

77 Orange River Colony, *Report of the Director of Education for the year ending June 30th, 1905* (Bloemfontein, Government Publishers, 1905), p. 18.

78 Orange River Colony, *Public Education Ordinance No. 29, 1905* (without place or publisher), p. 29.

great assistance to the Department. Their most important function remained the nomination of teachers. At this time, the Orange River Colony was on the eve of changing to a system of responsible government and this event would bring about further education legislation and changes to schooling.

Schooling under responsible government

The ORC was afforded responsible government by Britain in 1907 and General JBM Hertzog was appointed minister in charge of education. New education legislation for white children that provided for compulsory education for children between 7 and 16, the introduction of school fees, equal treatment of Dutch and English and instruction in Bible history up to Standard VI with the “conscience clause” applying, was forthcoming. School committees continued to play an important role in how the schools functioned and were to report matters that concerned the welfare or the efficiency of the school to the school board.⁷⁹ The policy on language was easier to carry out in the town schools and, generally, few objected to their children learning both languages. Mother tongue instruction in the lower classes was welcomed. However, in rural areas there were traces of fanaticism from both the Dutch and English. In essence, the language issue had two dimensions – educational and political. Surprisingly, since this had been such a hotly debated contention, there were reports of negligence regarding the tuition of Bible history.⁸⁰ One of the constraints within which the school committee system had to function, was the scarcity of properly qualified teachers. Furthermore, the efficiency of the committee was often compromised by administrative red-tape and political lobbying within the community.⁸¹ Tuition continued this course until Union in 1910 which occurred eight years after the signing of the Treaty of Vereeniging which marked the end of the Anglo Boer War.

Conclusion

This article provided an overview of how parents, the community, the church and the state, interchangeably and jointly, played a role in the provision of

79 Orange River Colony, *To provide for the better administration, control, support, maintenance and advancement of education and educational institutions, both private and public of a primary and secondary nature, Act No. 35, 1908* (without place or publisher, 1908).

80 Orange River Colony, *Report of the Director of Education, 1909-1910* (Bloemfontein, Argus, 1909-1910), pp. 12, 43-44.

81 CS le Roux, “A historical-educational appraisal of parental responsibilities...” (D.Ed., UNISA, 1999), p. 259.

schooling for children of European descent in the Orange Free State from early settlement in the mid-1830s to Union in 1910. How education was provided and what it constituted was influenced by distinct cultural, political, economic and ideological factors characterising the society of that time.

Parents were primarily responsible for their children's welfare and as such, before the establishment of schools in the OFS, which only occurred in 1850, Voortrekker parents ensured that their children were sufficiently educated to attain church membership. Parents took this task upon themselves and, if they were incapable, they appointed a private person to take on this responsibility. The type of education required for confirmation was basic and not of long duration; so, an itinerant teacher, who merely served for a few months before moving on to the next family, was adequate. As the community became more established, parents realised the need for more extensive schooling, but discovered that properly qualified teachers were not to be found. Consequently, in 1847 parents appealed directly to the Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church in the Cape Colony for assistance in finding and appointing suitable teachers. This was the precursor for joint church and parental involvement in schooling, as the church, in response to this request, procured two teachers from the Netherlands to teach in the Free State. In time, parents, community members and representatives of the church – generally the clergy – were represented on the school commissions which had been established to oversee schooling. The first of these school commissions was established in 1855 by the *Volksraad* under the independent Republic of the Orange Free State. The state recognised the important role that the church and community could play in providing quality schooling and, consequently, provided for the establishment of these bodies. School commissions carried out various duties related to the selection and appointment of teachers and the general running of the school. In time, these duties increased and parents, the community and the church, as represented on the school commission, decided matters concerning the curriculum, the language of instruction, the nature of religious instruction and school inspection. The success of a school was often attributed to the degree of enthusiasm and commitment shown by the school commission, clearly indicating the significant part the commission played. Parental and church involvement in education was reinstated after the Anglo Boer War, again in the form of school commissions. Under responsible government (1907) until Union (1910), education progressed and school committees remained functional, ensuring the input in education from parents, the community and the church.

The notion of state intervention in schooling was introduced by Sir Harry Smith when he instructed that the two teachers from the Netherlands, who had been secured by the church at the request of concerned parents, were to provide tuition in Dutch and in English. After the Orange River Sovereignty under British rule was returned to the Voortrekkers and the independent Republic of the Orange Free State was established, the *Volksraad* accepted that the provision of education was a state responsibility. However, education did not prosper and when Brand became president in 1864, he sought input from the clergy and the local community (magistrates) regarding the state of education and what could be done to improve it. This act is indicative of how the state sought church and community input regarding education and illustrates the cooperation between the various roleplayers in attempting to improve the provisioning of education. That education was a state responsibility was reiterated by the *Volksraad* in 1872, but this time greater effort was put into improving schooling. The major contribution of Dr John Brebner in investigating the position of education in the region and his efforts in drafting legislation (1874) which would place education on a firm footing should not be overlooked. Under his authority, education thrived, with significant increases in attendance and the number of schools established. In 1895 education was made compulsory, but continued progress in education was postponed, since Republican government ceased in 1900 when British military rule was instituted as a result of the outbreak of the Anglo Boer War.

During the war, education was exclusively controlled by the state and several schools were established in the concentration camps. The aim of education was the Anglicisation of the Dutch youth. Although this mission was never accomplished due to the short duration of the project, more children attended school during the war period than had prior to the war. This can be attributed to the fact that the youth were congregated in the concentration camps and several children who had hitherto not had access to schools, could be reached. The parents generally supported the school system since it, even though run by the British, afforded their children the education required for church membership.

Initially after the war, a return was made to joint state, church and parental involvement in schooling, but soon growing discord between the Department of Education and a number of Dutch parents became evident. Dissension was in relation to the language issue, the role and duties of school commissions and the nature of religious instruction. Parents called for guarantees regarding

Dutch language teaching and non-denominational religious instruction. A dual system of government and church-run CNE schools was established, but, in time, the differences were settled with most of the CNE schools amalgamating with the government schools.

The pursuit of solutions to these matters was to continue after Union and it would seem that even in the present day, language and culture remain prime issues of contention in multilingual and multicultural education circles in South Africa, and elsewhere in the world. The dissention is not confined to issues around language; it also embraces the complex social, political and economic factors associated with language use, finances and past inequalities. The issues that the OFS had to contend with were but a precursor of what was to follow in modern South African society – including the Free State.