

REPLIEK DEUR DR. NEVILLE ALEXANDER, DIREKTEUR, PROJECT FOR THE STUDY OF ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA, UCT

It is both a pleasure and a challenge to comment on the very carefully considered and important paper presented by Pieter Kapp. It is a contribution that merits the wide consideration and the scrutiny to which it will be subjected in the coming months in the debate about history as a subject in South African schools.

Ooreenstemmende Opvattinge

Ek wil graag begin deur die stelling te onderstreep waarmee ek saamstem. Onder andere stem ek saam dat geskiedenis "'n lewensnoodsaaklike opvoeding en

toerustingsmiddel vir die kinders van Suid-Afrika is" (1). As liefhebber van Cleo se doen en late kan ek ook nie anders nie. Ek voel so sterk oor geskiedenis as deel van die kurrikulum soos die sendelinge van toentertyd oor godsdiensoonderrig gevoel het.

Soos Kapp meen ek dat dit noodsaaklik is om die vak op 'n aantreklike, relevante en uitdagende manier aan te bied om sodoende onafhanklikheid en kritiese denkvermoë by ons jeug aan te moedig. Die dooie vak "geskiedenis" wat oor dooie mense handel is reeds die rede waarom die getalle studente wat die vak kies,

veral in skole vir blanke kinders, aan't dale is. Alhoewel ek ook glo dat die belangstelling in die vak tans onder swart kinders veel groter is, meen ek egter dat die stygende getalle in hulle skole meer met die beperkte opsies te doen het as met die beweerde "gut feeling that the subject opens windows for them". Dit geld altemit vir baie van die mees politiek bewuste studente maar as 'n algemene stelling is dit myns insiens 'n bietjie optimisties. Die meeste swart studente "kies" nog altyd geskiedenis as vak omdat hulle die vak bloot deur papegaaimetodes vir die eindeksamen kan baasraak.

Kapp's approach to the skills-content debate is exactly right. A disembodied history-skills (or meta-history) subject at school level is, if possible, deader than a traditional deadening history-contents subject. The real issue is, of course, the different possibilities we, as history teachers, have - or should have - to select content and to prioritise skills without falling into the trap of complete arbitrariness. In this connection, the determination of the core syllabus is the crucial process, to which I shall return below. Although he mentions as one of the implications of a more skills-orientated approach the need to retrain teachers by means of in-service courses (:4), this should be foregrounded more starkly. Besides the overall social motivation for the study of history (or for any other subject for that matter), it is axiomatic that without a core of competent, inspired and inspiring teachers history as a school subject is stillborn.

Professor Kapp se gedagtes oor identiteit is vir my heeltemal aanvaarbaar al sou ek die aksente ietwat anders plaas. "Oorvleuelende en uitkringende identiteite" is 'n onbetwyfelbare feit van die Suid-Afrikaanse samelewing. Daar is baie diepgaande waardes op die spel in hierdie verband. As u die sinspeling kan verdra: dit gaan om die vraag, as't ware, of ons 'n radio sonder grense of 'n radio met grense wil oprig! Dit is, myns insiens, lewensbelangrik om die vorming en omvorming van groepe en van groepsbewussyn as 'n dinamiese proses en nie as 'n onherroeplike gegewe te benader. 'n Vergelyking met die Heisenberg-formule in die fisika is hier van pas. Net soos materie onder sekere omstandighede as vloeiende golf en onder ander omstandighede as deeltjies verskyn, so is dit met die verskillende identiteite van die mens. Enige poging om groepsamehorigheid in monumentale graniet te verewig kan net tot konflik en konserwatiewe agterlikheid lei. In hierdie sin stem ek heeltemal saam dat dit dwaas sou wees om identiteit en etnisiteit te wil ignoreer.

Gee vir elke belang van dit godsdien, kultuur, streek of klas is, die geleentheid om die eie identiteit binne die

kaleidoskoop van die Suid-Afrikaanse werklikheid te bestudeer.

As dit nie gedoen word op 'n geordende en verantwoordelike wyse nie, sal dit op 'n ander wyse gedoen word (5).

Professor Kapp's interpretation of multiperspectivity merits careful consideration from a professional point of view. Multiperspectivity as a hermeneutic principle represents - perhaps we should say once again - a phase of reflection and self-doubt in human history. Many of the major events of the 20th century, such as the Nazi genocide, Hiroshima, Chernobyl, the fall of the Berlin wall together with all the antecedent events, the Aids plague, the ecological exhaustion of planet earth, amongst many others, have put in question many of the a priori of the monistic philosophies that put their stamp on this century. Most people in the modern world are instinctively sceptical about any "authorised" or "official" versions of history. Too much tipp-exxing or airbrushing of uncomfortable facts by totalitarian (and other) governments have come to light in recent years; indeed, these exposures (our own Historygate!) have contributed much to the discrediting of our discipline. However, besides these general considerations, there are specific considerations relating to the nature of the transition in South Africa that make a multiperspectival approach a strategic necessity. During the present transition which is characterised by a "neither-defeat-nor-victory" dynamic, it is going to be essential to "let a hundred flowers bloom and let a thousand schools of thought contend". Anything else would polarise the situation and send us off on an unpredictable trajectory.

In passing, I should like to remark that I don't believe that Kapp solves the problem of how we should assess the validity of the different perspectives (6). How we counter the danger of relativism that is inherent in the multiperspectival paradigm is a very complex matter. At the end of the day, we have to rely on extra-mural processes to pass judgment, as it were, on the question of validity. Peer assessment via the History teachers' associations rather than top-down Big Brother forms of assessment is probably a more effective and certainly a more acceptable route to our goal.

This brings me to my two main problems with Professor Kapp's paper. These are the determination of the core syllabus and his suggestion of an interim syllabus. They are, of course, closely related and I will discuss them as a single issue.

Instead of an interim syllabus, on the basis of which history examinations can be conducted, I would rather suggest a moratorium on all external examinations for

a period of two or three years. Because of the distance that separates the various interpretations of South African history from one another, I believe we need a period of maximum public debate on what we should teach in the history syllabus and how it should be taught. Radio and television as well as the print media have to be used in order to debate in detail and in public the very issues we are discussing here today. In particular, we should be discussing that which we consider essential for the children of a new South Africa to know, i.e., what should constitute the core syllabus. This should involve, initially and periodically when syllabus revision is deemed necessary, both parents and senior students even if the process is largely gestural at the beginning. It is one way of ensuring that a sense of owning the history curriculum is generated among the people at large and it will have the effect of restoring the subject to its proper status as one of the keys to civic consciousness. After such a wide-ranging public discussion in which all interested parties and institutions should be invited to participate, the matter can be left to the specialists' organisations, in particular to the History Teachers' Associations, for finalisation. The relevant government departments will clearly have a role to play in determining the syllabus, but it should not be more than that of overseeing the process especially with a view to ensuring its feasibility and implementability.

Not examining the subject History externally for a period of two or three years should not disrupt the education process in any way. Class teachers or History departments at schools would simply do what they have always done in those classes where only internal examinations are required. Unless there are signs of gross frivolousness the new government(s) should automatically approve the results of such examinations.

In verband met die bepaling van die kerninhoud en die modulêre benadering tot die leerplan dink ek dat Kapp se voorstelle (4.2.3, 4.2.4 en 4.4 as geheel) 'n goeie uitgangspunt is, maar hulle verg meer kritiese bespreking en konkretheid. Ek stem heeltemal saam dat

Die gesprek oor die inhoud kan net koers kry as soveel as moontlike praktiese voorstelle op die tafel geplaas word.

Hierdie taak behoort inderdaad ons volle aandag oor die volgende paar maande te geniet en soos ek alreeds aangedui het sou 'n reeks oop gesprekke, debatte, kompetisies, ens., baie help om die proses aan die gang te sit. Wat ons as onderwysers en opvoedkundiges betref, behoort ons in ons tydskrifte en op ons konferensies die teoretiese raamwerk en die historiese agtergrond vir ons voorstelle uiteen te sit.

Let me conclude with a brief reference to Professor Kapp's presentation of the main pedagogical issues involved in the debate about history as a school subject. He raises all the most important questions in regard to the difficulties which a multiperspectival approach is likely to occasion for some students, the new kinds of textbooks and other teaching materials that will have to be designed and created and the new ways of assessing students' work. These are all extremely valuable points that ought to be workshopped and analysed in detail with a view to informing class teachers of the many possible approaches to each of these questions. I should say, however, that I don't quite agree with his apparent opposition to an integrated studies approach especially in the primary and junior secondary phases of schooling. In my view, we should try to have as high a degree of integration for as long as possible and should phase in specialisation via interdisciplinary courses so that students can appreciate the relationship between the analytical necessity for discrete subjects such as history and the complex totality of social life and social reality which the specialist analyses attempt to illuminate and to explain.

Finally, I should like to congratulate Professor Kapp on what I found to be a most stimulating contribution in spite of one or two points on which I hold a quite different view. Because of the clarity of his own standpoint and the clarity of his exposition, his views will undoubtedly give rise to a very fruitful exchange among students and teachers of history.