

HANDS-ON ARTICLES

ANALYSING THE CONSTRUCTION OF SOUTH AFRICAN YOUTH IN HISTORICAL-RELATED IMAGES AND TEXTS AROUND THE TIME OF 16 JUNE 2011

Siobhan Glanvill
School of Education
University of the Witwatersrand
siobhan.glanvill@wits.ac.za

*By idolizing those whom we honour, we do a disservice to them and to ourselves...
We fail to recognize that we could go and do likewise. (Charles V Willie)¹*

Abstract

This paper aims to investigate how young people in post-apartheid South Africa are being constructed in negative ways in the light of how we commemorate and teach the Anti-apartheid struggle. Is it possible to teach the stories of the past without burdening this generation with guilt and paralysing the youth in terms of their own struggles? It specifically focuses on how the media are currently reconstructing the struggle icons as superhuman, and in so doing, implying that the youth can never live up to the achievements of these heroes. I am interested in how history, as it is taught in our schools can play a role in restoring agency and a healthy respect for the past.

Keywords: Media; Construction of youth; Commemoration; Icons; June 16 2011; History lessons; Youth agency.

Introduction

Since 1994, June 16 has been a public holiday known as YouthDay. This day, like Women's Day (9 August), has become distanced from its original meaning in that both these days are seen by many as celebrating the present

¹ JW Loewen, *Lies my teacher told me* (The New Press: New York, 1995) p. 9.

with many South Africans not really knowing much about the events that made these days significant. In the post-1994 spirit of reconciliation, public holidays with political connections were reconstructed to try and create a new South African identity that all could relate to and that the days were about moving forward as one nation, not just about bitter memories from a divided past.

Young South Africans had played a significant role in helping to bring about democracy especially in the traumatic events of the June 16 Soweto Uprising.² Thabo Leshilo describes how his life was profoundly affected by the day:³

June 16 1976 marked the turning point in my young life I would not be exaggerating to say the day marked the beginning of the end of my childhood ignorance of the world I was among the children who had come to know too much too soon, as the Black Consciousness exponent Muntu Myeza was later to say... I was shocked to read that the dead boy (Hector) was about my age. It could easily have been me, I thought. I was only five months shy of my thirteenth birthday.

History records that many young people left school and took up the cause of *Liberation before Education*. Karis and Gerhart's research showed that, "In late 1977 it was estimated that almost a quarter of a million pupils were boycotting schools nationwide..."⁴ It is understandable that after the achievement of democracy in 1994 it was hoped that young people could be truly "young" again and focus on the business of getting through school and enjoy activities that one normally associates with their age group. Politics should become once more the domain of adults.

Bray and Moses explain how the desire for a sense of "normalcy" after the elections in 1994 meant that, generations and gender were called upon to resume their "so-called proper places".⁵ It was seen as time for young people to move away from politics and protest and take advantage of the opportunities a democratic South Africa would bring them.

The involvement of young people in the anti-apartheid struggle had resulted in two dominant perceptions about the youth: one as 'hero' and the other as 'villain'.

2 T Karis and G Gerhart, *From protest to challenge, Vol. 5: Nadir and Resurgence, 1964-1979* (Unisa Press, 1997) provides excellent historical details about the role youth played in the Soweto Uprising.

3 T Leshilo, "A Day of Profound Historic Significance"; K Hlongwane, S Ndlovu and M Mutloatse, *Soweto '76. Reflections on the liberation struggles. Commemorating the 30th Anniversary of June 16 1976* (Pan Macmillan, Johannesburg, 2006) pp. 121-122.

4 T Karis and G Gerhart, *From Protest to Challenge, Vol. 5. Nadir and Resurgence, 1964-1979* (Unisa Press, 1997) p. 325.

5 Bray and Moses quoted by Pendlebury, Hendersen and E Kay, M Tisdall, "Theorizing children's' participation: Trans-disciplinary perspectives from South Africa", *Perspectives in Education*, Vol. 29, No. 1, March 2011, Special Issue.

Bray and Moses describe an incident in 2007 when learners at a secondary school in Cape Town protested against a decision made by their deputy principal.⁶

Dominant adult discourse suggested that the learners had behaved inappropriately, and that children's participation would be legitimate only in alignment with adult agendas. Refusing to go to school is seen as failing to live up to the tenets of responsible citizenship within South Africa's new democracy. Thus to be viewed in the (adult) public domain as protesting 'heroes' no longer appears possible for the current generation of children. Yet the grievances around schooling, unemployment and basic service delivery remain.

Afua Twum-Danso describes how youth are manipulated throughout Africa to participate in politics in times of violent conflict but appear to be marginalized when the nation is at peace. He writes that:⁷

South African children and young people were a key to the ending of apartheid, but they are now invisible in the so-called 'peace', where their marginalization has arguably contributed to their political apathy.

The research done by Bray and Moses in the Rhini (Grahamstown) study in 2008 has revealed some important insights into young people's reasons for not wanting to get involved in politics post-1994. A matric student explains how disillusioned he is with the way that his uncle has been treated after all that he did to fight for freedom:⁸

My uncle was a local freedom fighter, and he was also a local hero. He was fighting for the rights of the poor people. But now that we have acquired freedom and democracy he does not benefit from anything, and nobody cares about him, even the people that he used to fight with... So I would rather focus on my education, and secure the place in the next generation.

The *Mail and Guardian* interviewed young South Africans around Youth Day 2011 and it appeared that many of them felt as if their opinions did not matter and that their voices are not heard.

For example, Thandi Mokaba commented:⁹

There's so much potential to use in this country if I could take over... So many people have energy and good ideas and we don't use them. Not just us young people in high school, but those of all ages. I think government's problem is they don't listen... They should listen to us, since one day we'll be in places of power.

6 R Bray and S Moses, "Children and participation in South Africa. Exploring the Landscape." *Perspectives in Education*, Vol. 29, No.1, March 2011, Special Issue.

7 A Twum-Danso, "The political child"; A McIntyre, ed., *Invisible stakeholders- children and war in Africa, Institute for Security Studies*, Pretoria, 2005.

8 R Bray and S Moses, "Children and participation in South Africa...", *Perspectives in Education*, Vol. 29, No. 1, March 2011.

9 "If we ruled the world...", *Voices; Mail & Guardian*, 17-23 June 2011, p. 4.

Perhaps the subject of History could be a space for these young people to learn about inspirational leaders from our past who chose to stand up for what they believed in. The important task in front of us as history teachers is to let our young people see that these individuals were human beings and not some kind of rare super heroes that don't really exist in real life.

Constructions of Youth June 16 2011

Thirty five years after the original events of 16 June 1976 our media was full of criticism of a generation of young people who see Youth Day as one of entitlement and literally as a day for youth to celebrate with wild parties and lots of drinking. The dominant perception is not of youth as "heroes" but rather as "villains".

The cartoonist Dov Fedler, depicts this in a cartoon he drew re-creating the iconic image of Hector Pieterse to make a shocking statement about the Youth of 2011. The young boy being carried is drawn clutching empty beer bottles and the caption asks: "Is he dead? No just dead drunk..."¹⁰

A moving letter written by a young person called Thabiso Kgabung sums up this perception:¹¹

Youth Day is just another date on the calendar to be enjoyed as a holiday. Most of us indulge in alcohol, sexual intercourse and substance abuse... Perhaps the shift has moved to the celebration and not the acknowledgement of the events of June 16, but funnily enough, we are quick to appear in the media regarding high failure rates, drug intake and sexual activities behind school gates. I can only wonder how the youth define priorities.

When speaking to my students about this perception I was amazed at how many had taken the opportunity to take this cartoon image which had also been circulated as a photograph and set up their *Facebook* pagesto challenge the stereotypes.¹²

10 D Fedler (Available at: fedler@africa.com), as accessed on 16 June 2011.

11 Letters in Brief, *The Times*, 23 June 2011, p. 16.

12 Photograph sent to me by Njabulo Mkhize a student teacher at Wits School of Education June 2011. He wanted me to see that not all young people were accepting this construction of their attitude towards June 16.

Image 1: Facebook page sent to the author by Njabulo Mkhize



Source: Njabulo Mkhize a student teacher at Wits School of Education sent photo to the author.

What is important to note is that Njabulo found an original close-up of Sam Nzima's iconic photograph and then juxtaposed the two photographs to confront his friends with the two representations and asked the difficult question: "Is this commemoration?"

After this conversation with Njabulo Mkhize and other students, I decided to explore some of the issues in this paper to try and understand why there were so many negative perceptions about the youth of 2011 not living up to the youth of 1976.¹³

People like Jonathan Jansen and Mamphela Ramphele¹⁴ are possible role models for the older generation in terms of understanding and valuing our young people.

Jansen writes:¹⁵

Whenever I witness the idealism of young people, I remember why I became a teacher. It is not simply what we might offer young people in the form of knowledge and skills; it is what they teach us in return about humanity, healing and hope... Our future lies with this post-apartheid generation of younger people. Our first duty

¹³ General discussions on talk radio shows. Such as one led by Eusebius McKaiser on Radio 702 on 16 June 2011.

¹⁴ Jonathan Jansen is the Vice Chancellor of the University of the Free State who writes for *The Times* newspaper every Thursday. His particular passion is trying to understand how young South Africans have been affected by the past. His best known book is "Knowledge in the Blood." Mamphela Ramphele is also well known for her outspoken commentary on post-apartheid South Africa and as a member of the Black Consciousness Movement in the 1970s she is particularly concerned with opportunities for young people.

¹⁵ J Jansen, *The Times*, 7 April 2011, p. 9.

is not to embitter them with our memories. Our second task is not to dampen their idealism. We should rather encourage uncommon valour in the next generation of South African leaders.

I wonder if we have spent so much energy trying to not “embitter” the youth with our memories that we now leave them without a sense of where they come from and that it is more than possible that South Africa has many more Nelson Mandelas, Albertina Sisulus, Helen Josephs, Beyers Naudes.¹⁶ In our attempts to respect the heroes of the struggle have we turned them into *supermen and women* and somehow implied that there could only be *one struggle*?

Mamphela Ramphele wrote in 2002:¹⁷

What is remarkable is that these young people have not yet given up on adults. Adults have failed them at many levels in recent history. During the apartheid era parents could not protect their own children against police harassment and the ravages of poverty. In the post-apartheid society poor parents still seem marginal to decision making affecting bread- and- butter issues in society.

It seems as if in 2011 we as the “parents” continue to let them down and perhaps they are giving up on expecting adults to provide a better world for them.

In my last year of teaching in a Johannesburg high school, I was fortunate enough to teach a granddaughter of Chief Albert Luthuli. She became our Head Girl and certainly would have made her grandfather proud. One day after a lesson on June 16 1976, she came up to me and said: “I wish I lived back then, they had so much to fight for...”

This shocked me into realizing that perhaps I had idealised the Youth of 1976 and that she and others could not see that every generation has its own struggles. I needed to realize that my own experiences at Wits University in the 1980s would affect how I felt about people like Mandela and Helen Joseph as they were heroes to us.

16 Nelson Mandela became the first President of a democratic South Africa in 1994 after fighting for freedom and enduring imprisonment for 27 years as a leader of the ANC. Albertina Sisulu was married to struggle leader Walter Sisulu but became a leader in her own capacity as co-president of the United Democratic Front (UDF) in 1983. She passed away on 2 June 2011. Helen Joseph was a white woman who publically supported the ANC she marched to Pretoria in 1956 and was imprisoned and on death row in the late 70s. Beyers Naude was a white Afrikaner preacher in the NG Kerk who became a member of the ANC (Available at: *South African History Online*, <http://www.sahistory.org.za>)

17 M Ramphele, *Steering By the Stars* (Tafelberg, Cape Town, 2002), p. 13.

Reconstructions of Struggle Icons as *Supermen* and *Superwomen*:

The Mandela Effect

Image 2: Giant Shoes to Fill Photograph taken by Halden Krog. The caption reads: “Young Loyalist: Subomi Andekola, 2, takes a little breather at the foot of Nelson Mandela’s statue in Sandton Square on Freedom Day in Johannesburg yesterday.”



Source: Photograph taken by Halden Krog, *The Times*, 28 April 2011, p. 5.

This image at first glance is delightful but if you read the caption and think a little more about the message it needs to be challenged:

First the caption “Giant Shoes to Fill” implies that this could be an impossible task for this little girl, Subomi Andekola. One almost feels sorry for her as we realize the enormity of this task. Subomi Andekola is also constructed by the caption underneath the photograph that suggests that she is a “young loyalist”; it is assumed that she is already an ANC supporter celebrating Freedom Day in Sandton Square. What choices will she have to make up her own mind and to find the strength to fight her own causes?

The legacies of Albertina Sisulu and Kader Asmal: How do young South Africans compare?

Just before June 16 2011, the nation lost one of the country’s most beloved women, Albertina Sisulu¹⁸. Zapiro’s cartoon in the *Sunday Times* on June 5th 2011 treated her passing with great dignity and respect.

18 B Nzimande, *The Times*, 9 June 2011, p. 17; A Motshekga, Obituary written in the *Mail&Guardian*, 10-16 June 2011, p. 22.

She is reconstructed as a “Great Tree” looking kindly down at two little children. Not to take anything away from MaSisulu’s legacy but again the idea of a “Great Tree” implies that women like her are very rare and not possible for this generation who can only admire what she achieved and try to look after the little trees in the background that represent the “millions who benefited from the seeds of her struggle”.¹⁹

A similar response was noted with the death of Kader Asmal on June 22 2011. The editorial of *The Times*²⁰ stated that:

Asmal’s moral compass helped steer us to freedom. South Africa yesterday lost one of its great citizens. Kader Asmal, a leading light of the anti-apartheid struggle, has died. Asmal, who served under two successive presidents as cabinet minister, deserves to be honoured as a true South African whose dedication to the country’s liberation struggle will forever be beyond dispute...

The reconstruction of Kader Asmal as our nation’s “moral compass” is also depicted in Zapiro’s cartoon published in the *Mail&Guardian* on the 23rd June 2011.

Here again children are drawn in a position which suggests that they have choices to make about which direction they want to follow. Do they choose Asmal’s way which is about “Ethics; Humanism; Accountability; Non-racialism and Constitutionality” or do they go with “tenderpreneurship; Cadre deployment; racial populism; Corruption and the Secrecy Bill?”

Zapiro suggests that if they ignore Asmal’s moral leadership they will be heading in the direction of a furtive Julius Malema (controversial leader of the ANC Youth League suspended and expelled from the ANC in 2012) depicted hiding in the dark forest.²¹

Perhaps all these aforementioned heroes of the Struggle for Freedom deserve accolades, but what concerns me is the way that the youth are told again and again that they are nothing compared to these individuals and the best they can hope for is to follow in their footsteps.²²

When adjudicating the Chief Albert Luthuli Oral History competition in the Thembisa district (East Rand), I was saddened to hear this sentiment being expressed by young people themselves. One of the topics was the “unsung heroes of the struggle” and many of them spoke about how special

¹⁹ Zapiro, *Sunday Times*, 5 June 2011.

²⁰ *The Times*, 23 June 2011, p. 16.

²¹ Zapiro, *Mail & Guardian*, 23 June 2011, p. 39.

²² For example, Blade Nzimande’s article on Albertina Sisulu with the sub-heading: *Mama Sisulu leaves a legacy from which our youth can learn*, *The Times*, 9 June 2011, p. 17.

these people were and that their generation was basically wasting all that they had sacrificed.²³ Many expressed the opinion that the only option that this generation had was to try and emulate these great men and women in some way.

Not just a South African issue

An attitude of veneration towards great leaders of the past is not unique to South Africa. The American historian James W Loewen writes:

This chapter is about heroification, a degenerative process (much like calcification) that makes people over into heroes. Through this process our educational media turn flesh-and-blood individuals into pious, perfect creatures without conflicts, pain, credibility or human interest.

Loewen explores the representations of Helen Keller and Woodrow Wilson in American History textbooks and he concludes that the way that they have been represented is problematic:²⁴

For when textbook authors leave out the warts, the problems, the unfortunate character traits, and the mistaken ideas, they reduce heroes from dramatic men and women to melodramatic stick figures. Their inner struggles disappear and they become goody-goody, not merely good.

Loewen explains that if young Americans could know the whole story they might find inspiration in the life of Helen Keller rather than seeing her as a caricature of a human being. He believes that: "Denying students the humanness of Keller, Wilson and others keeps students in intellectual immaturity... Our children end up without realistic role models to inspire them".²⁵

Mandela is always saying that the struggle for freedom was not just about him²⁶ and yet in the junior years (Grades 4-9) we teach as if the road to democracy was walked by him alone. It is understandable and important that we do know about this wonderful man but we do not do justice to the story by just focusing on Mandela or by building him up to be more than human.

23 Adjudication of Young Historians competition, Thembisa District, Johannesburg. 2010 as witnessed by the author, S Glanvill.

24 JW Loewen, *Lies My Teacher Told Me*, 1995, p. 9.

25 JW Loewen, *Lies My Teacher Told Me*, 1995, p. 25.

26 For example in his farewell speech before handing over to Thabo Mbeki he states; "... As we hand over the baton it is appropriate that I should thank the ANC for shaping me as such a symbol of what it stands for... We take leave so that the competent generation of lawyers, computer experts, economists, financiers, doctors, industrialists, engineers and above all ordinary workers and peasants can take the ANC into the new millennium." Quoted in A Sampson, *Mandela* (HarperCollins, London, 2000), p. 544.

Kenosi Mosalakae seems to agree with James Loewen as he wrote in a letter to the *Sunday Times* that Mamphela Ramphele's claim that "Mandela belongs to us all" is more myth than reality because:²⁷

It is the belief in this myth that continues to stagnate the people's intellectual development... Mandela is judged not on what he says or did but on what people imagine he is or has done... We would be in a better position in terms of "national" unity if Mandela had unequivocally acknowledged the Robert Sobukwes, Steve Bikos and Tsietsi Mashinini of this world for what they did and sacrificed for the emancipation of the people rather than ignore them for not being in the ANC. Oneness of a people in a country is only possible when there is mutual respect for each other.

We would do better as a nation to encourage our young people to question and challenge the leadership rather than accept the *status quo*. Too many of them feel obligated to the ANC without realizing that there are options. They need to know that Hector Pieterse, as tragic as his story was, was not the only hero on June 16 1976.²⁸

When discussing this with my Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) group they expressed concern for the way that the death of Hector Pieterse has been "commodified". The iconic photograph has come to represent the day and that this has led to the stories of other individuals like Tsietsi Mashinini²⁹ literally disappearing from the picture. This really does no justice to Hector Pieterse or the many other youth involved in the day and perhaps has resulted in the 2011 photograph that caused such uproar. (The one that Njabulo has challenged on his *Facebook* page.)

When I spoke to my son (22 years old) about the photograph he saw something different to me. I was horrified by what I perceived to be a lack of respect and understanding of the original event. He interpreted the image as a powerful statement from an apparently angry youth. Also that not much appears to have actually changed if comparing the backgrounds (township buildings or lack of buildings in both photographs) which may be expressions of a lack of opportunities.

27 Letter, K Mosalakae, *Sunday Times*, 5 June 2011.

28 K Hlonwane, S Ndlovu and M Mutloatse (Eds.), See the "Report of the Commission of Enquiry into the Riots at Soweto and Elsewhere from the 16th of June to the 28th February 1977"; Soweto '76: Reflections on the Liberation Struggles (Pan MacMillan, Johannesburg, 2006), pp. 188-225.

29 Tsietsi Mashinini was the leader of the South African Student Movement in Soweto elected in 1973 strongly influenced by the Black Consciousness Movement led by Steve Biko. For more details see T Karis and G Gerhart *From Protest to Challenge, Vol. 5, Nadir and Resurgence, 1964-1979* (Unisa Press, Pretoria, 1997).

Another perspective given to me by a history student³⁰ is that perhaps the photograph means that “the youth are okay”, that they now can appreciate the day rather than fighting the political battles of the late 70s and 80s. This seems to fit with the idea of a return to some kind of ‘normality’ post-1994, where young people have space and time to be *young*.

Loewen observed that the “heroification” of Helen Keller actually turned her into the subject of many inappropriate jokes:³¹

In so doing, school children are not poking cruel fun at a disabled person; they are deflating a pretentious symbol that is too good to be real.

Have we in South Africa done the same to our iconic images and heroes?

Baby Tywa, an activist involved in the events of 1976, believes that the youth of today would benefit from the kind of mentorship that her generation received from their leaders.³²

My reflections on the day are anchored on the people who built our characters, made us who we are today, leaders who ensured that we imbued the virtues and discipline that underpinned the underground leadership of those days... Drawing from their teachings, we tirelessly sustained our hope, had our rough edges trimmed and contained our eagerness to topple the government of the day.

What is refreshing about Tywa’s article is that she acknowledges that it is time for her generation to take on the same mentoring roles with today’s youth rather than just complaining about their lack of respect for the sacrifices of the older generation.³³

Is it not time for this generation to stop watching from the sidelines with trepidation? Should they not emulate the Comrade Joe Qgabis of yesteryear; or should we resign ourselves, throw our hands in the air and act as if history teaches us nothing?

If one reads and listens to comments about the youth made by the generation that represents their parents, it is frightening how few actually feel accountable for the world these young people have inherited. These very same individuals are quick to compare young people with the icons of the struggle but conveniently ignore their own role as mentors. There is plenty of advice about what young people should be grateful for but not enough about how they too can be heroes of their own struggles.

30 A Visser, June 2011.

31 JW Loewen, *Lies My Teacher Told Me*, 1995, p.26.

32 B Tywa, “Today’s youth need mentors”, *The Star*, 16 June 2011, p. 10.

33 B Tywa, “Today’s youth need mentors”, *The Star*, 16 June 2011, p. 10.

It is worth noting the words of Michelle Obama (wife of US President Barack Obama):³⁴

Now, I know as your generation looks back on that struggle and on the many liberation movements of the past century, you may think that all of the great moral struggles have already been won. As you hear the stories of lions like Madiba and Sisulu and Luthuli, you may think you can never measure up to such greatness. But while today's challenges might not always inspire the lofty rhetoric or the high drama of struggles past, the injustices at hand are no less glaring, the human suffering no less acute. So make no mistake about it: there are still so many causes worth sacrificing for. There is still so much history yet to be made. You can be the generation...

What role can the history classroom play in enabling and empowering young people to meet the challenges of participating in a democracy?

In many ways this is about how History teachers view their subject and relates to how they feel about handling emotive and controversial topics. Kitson and McCully's research into history teaching in Northern Ireland defines teachers as being "avoiders, containers and risk-takers."³⁵ These broad categories are useful in that they outline how teacher's perceptions of the subject of history affect decisions about discussions on topics that could be emotive and controversial.

The "avoider" will not see that history lessons could be about current and future issues relevant to the students' lives. They see their task as being focused on good exam results and being able to write solid essays. The lessons are always teacher-centered with no room for listening to young voices.

The "container" could allow some discussion about current issues but it would be limited and very much controlled by the teacher.

The "risk-taker" is someone who believes that teaching history is about changing the world. Their lessons are always about linking the past to what is happening today. To this teacher, their most important achievement is to help young people find their own voice and to challenge and question everything.

These categories are presented as a continuum and realistically most history teachers would probably see themselves as moving between the categories as the complexities of meeting external exam requirements do not always allow

34 Michelle Obama's speech made at the African Women Leaders Forum Conference at Regina Mundi Church Soweto, quoted in the *Sowetan*, 23 June 2011, p. 13.

35 A Kitson and A McCully, "You hear about it for real at school: Avoiding, containing and risk-taking in the history classroom", *Teaching History*, 2005, p. 35.

for debating every issue. It is just useful to see how history teachers in other parts of the world do grapple with similar issues.

Curriculum and Policy Statements (CAPS)

The latest Curriculum and Policy Documents suggest that the Social Sciences (Grades 4-9) should “provide opportunities for learners to look at their own worlds with fresh, critical eyes.” It implicitly states that the study of History is supposed to support citizenship within a democracy by:³⁶

- Explaining and encouraging the values of the South African Constitution;
- Encouraging civic responsibility and responsible leadership, including raising current social and environmental concerns;
- Promoting human rights and peace by challenging prejudices involving race, class, gender, ethnicity and xenophobia; and
- Preparing young people for local, regional, national, continental and global responsibility.

The table of skills³⁷ suggests that already in Grade 4 learners should be critically analysing and evaluating a variety of information about the past. They should be encouraged to debate and to challenge sources that only present one perspective. They are already starting to understand that “history is a process of historical enquiry” and that “there are many ways of looking at the same thing in the past.” This same table is used again for the Grades 10-12 (FET Phase) but more complexity is introduced. For example the word ‘sources’ is only used from Grade 7 onwards as Grades 4-6 are told about ‘how we find information about the past.’ The big difference is in the concepts that Grade 10s to 12s are expected to work with.

From these few extracts it is possible that History is expected to be the place that young people engage with the past and challenge pre-conceived ideas, which suggests that they should apply these same skills to make sense of their own worlds and definitely should challenge media stereotypes about themselves.

This same document seems to entrench some of my concerns about too much emphasis on iconic leaders such as Nelson Mandela. The Grade 9 topic

36 Republic Of South Africa, *Curriculum and Policy Statement*, January 2011. Social Sciences Senior Phase, pp. 9-11.

37 Republic of South Africa, *Curriculum and Policy Statement*, January 2011. Social Sciences Senior Phase, pp. 11-12.

entitled, “Turning Points in South African History 1960, 1976 and 1990,” states that three key turning points were selected to “allow the learners to appreciate the significance of these events in more depth.”³⁸ What is interesting to me is that the brief contextual notes or guidelines in the document only mention Nelson Mandela by name and yet they focus on the formation of the PAC and events that led to the 1976 Soweto Uprising. The third event is entitled, “1990: Release of Nelson Mandela and the unbanning of liberation movements.” It seems a pity that they did not specifically mention Robert Sobukwe or Steve Biko³⁹ in the other significant turning points.

We as History educators need to be vigilant and ensure that our learners gain access to a more inclusive past and a deeper understanding of the context of the day-so we see the complexities and ambiguities that help learners to understand that our issues are not that different.

The Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) for Grades 10-12 (FET) is guided by the overall key question of “How do we understand our world today?”⁴⁰ Unfortunately the new curriculum does not have the same emphasis on key questions that the outcomes based curriculum had, they have been simplified and generalised. This might however provide an opportunity for the learners to come up with their own key questions.

The enquiry approach

The idea of learners thinking up questions and moving away from looking for answers to predetermined questions relates to a pedagogy used very successfully by the Philosophy for Children approach first outlined by Matthew Lipman.⁴¹ This pedagogy is challenging for educators who like to know exactly what direction their lesson will be moving in but it really does allow learners opportunities to listen to each other and to look for questions rather than answers.

Educators in the U.S., Britain and Australia are achieving great success with this methodology as they find that the learners are engaged in the lesson right from the start as the educator provides an initial stimulus which could be a concept like ‘war’ or a photograph or an extract from a source. The class is

38 CAPS, Social Sciences Senior Phase, 2011, p. 48.

39 Robert Sobukwe was the leader of the Pan African Congress that broke away from the ANC in 1959 and Steve Biko was the charismatic leader of the Black Consciousness Movement in the 1970s.

40 CAPS, History Further Education and Training, 2011, p. 8.

41 M Lipman, *Thinking In Education* (Cambridge University Press,1991).

given 'thinking time' and each learner is encouraged to write down a question. The learners then choose one question through a democratic process where each learner presents their question and then the class votes. This one question is often an amalgamation of two or three questions that through negotiation are seen as fitting together.

The class then begins the discussion around the chosen question and very clear rules are established about respecting each other and listening. The educator plays a very important role as facilitator but is also part of the community of enquiry and is seen to be learning from the learners as well as making sure that all are comfortable with the way the discussion is going.

Learners are encouraged to respectfully disagree with each other's statements if they think that their reasons are not good enough. There is an emphasis on not just making statements but on always looking for 'good' reasons, which of course is exactly the kind of approach history requires. These communities of enquiry often end with more questions than answers but this can be very valuable as a way of introducing a new topic or concept in history as the learners will be challenging and thinking critically as they explore the evidence in the textbooks and elsewhere.

The journal for history teachers produced by the Historical Association in Britain advocates that key issues in history classrooms should be approached through an enquiry process. For example, "Why have interpretations of the Battle of Rorke's Drift changed over time?"⁴² This activity introduces learners to a variety of source material; from maps and paintings to the film *Zulu*. Learners are encouraged to think about the way that the events of the battle have been constructed and reconstructed from 1879 to the 21st Century. The authors comment that, "We encouraged students to emphasise the reasons why the interpretation changed over time."⁴³ This approach is definitely encouraging independent and critical analysis.

What can we do in the history classroom?

Ultimately it is desirable that by the time a student reaches Grade 12 they should have a clear understanding of how history is constructed by historians and they should be able to think critically and evaluate a variety of sources

42 G Fullard and T Wheeley, "Why do historical interpretations change over time?", *Teaching History*, 142, March 2011, p. 48.

43 G Fullard and T Wheeley, "Why do historical interpretations change over time?" *Teaching History*, 142, March 2011, p. 49.

and select evidence to create their own interpretations of the past. In contrast to the way my generation experienced History at school (rote learning from one Afrikaner Nationalist textbook) this should mean that this generation is better equipped to lead our democracy but we need to provide the spaces and opportunities this kind of teaching requires.

We, as History teachers, need to ensure that we provide a variety of sources and that we don't just rely on one "approved" textbook. Most importantly we need to allow discussion and debate so that our young people become used to hearing different voices and opinions and don't see this as a problem but rather as a sign of a healthy democracy that they can and should contribute to. In the light of possible censorship laws (the Protection of Information Bill) being introduced in our country it is so important that we encourage our learners to think and question everything that they read, hear or see.

Conclusion

The history classroom provides many opportunities for using the past to make sense of the present but we as history teachers need to take heed of the words of the American historian James Loewen and not "reduce our heroes from dramatic men and women to melodramatic stick figures."⁴⁴ We need to encourage our learners to see how human these individuals were and yet they were capable of achieving the most extraordinary things. We hopefully wish to inspire our young people to believe that they too have the same capacity to change their worlds.

⁴⁴ J Loewen, *Lies My Teacher Told Me* (New York, The New Press, 1995).