

**FROM THE HSRC REPORT**

**HISTORY TEACHERS AND THEIR WORK**

During 1989 a comprehensive empirical investigation into the teaching of history in South Africa was undertaken by the Human Sciences Research Council. History teachers, headmasters, lecturers, subject advisors/superintendents/inspectors, standard 7 and standard 9 pupils from all education authorities took part in the investigation. The questionnaires covered a variety of issues and produced a remarkable collection of empirical data. Although these were published in the official report<sup>1</sup>, the report itself has not yet received the attention it deserves because the other more theoretical aspects of the research project has not yet been published. It should become available by the middle of 1992.

The empirical data presents a source of untapped information. We believe that it deserves more attention and wider exposition. The data could also be utilised for more in depth analysis and discussion. With this in view we will publish a series of three articles on some of the results produced. We will also offer possible interpretations or deductions from these results which do not necessarily correspond with that of the HSRC.

Teachers and pupils are invited to respond to these data and interpretations. How do your personal views correlate with those of the sample group? How do your pupils react to some of the views of their peer groups or of the teachers? Send us your reaction and we will publish the best ones. Restrict your comments to 500 words.

Selections from the following three sets of data will be serialised.

- The response of history teachers to a number of critical issues.
- Views of standard 7 pupils on their experience of history teaching.
- What do standard 9 pupils think of the value of history as a school subject?

In some cases the table of results will be represented in full. Where the type of question led to a long list of relevant issues, we have selected only those that we believe are most significant and relevant. In all cases the number of the table is that of the original in the HSRC Report. This will enable readers who would like to compare it with the original, to do so more readily.

**1. How well qualified are the teachers of history?**

**TABLE 2.7 QUALIFICATIONS IN HISTORY AT UNDERGRADUATE LEVEL**

Qualifications	POPULATION GROUP							
	Black		White		Coloured		Indian	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
History III	8	50,00	20	95,23	15	88,24	28	90,32
History II	1	6,25			1	5,88		
History I	2	12,50						
None	5	31,25	1	4,76			1	3,23
No response					1	5,88	2	6,45
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>100,00</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>100,00</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>100,00</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>100,00</b>

**TABLE 2.8 POSTGRADUATE QUALIFICATIONS IN HISTORY**

Qualifications	POPULATION GROUP							
	Black		White		Coloured		Indian	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
B.A. Honours	1	6,25	5	23,81	4	23,53	9	29,03
M.A.			1	4,76	1	5,88		
None	15	93,75	14	66,67	11	64,71	22	70,97
No response			1	4,76	1	5,88		
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>100,00</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>100,00</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>100,00</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>100,00</b>

Comment

- The fact that there are teachers teaching history without any training in history, is matter for serious concern.
- The disappointing low percentage of history teachers with a post-graduate qualification in history must raise serious questions about how well equipped they are to teach the complicated issues involved in the syllabus. Even more important: how will they be able to handle the new approaches envisaged in history teaching: teaching a variety of perspectives on events, skills-based learning, greater freedom to choose content etc.
- Serious attention must be given to well-designed and professionally structured in-service training courses.

**2. How do history teachers view their own training as teachers?**

**TABLE 2.10 ADEQUACY OF TRAINING FOR HISTORY TEACHERS**

Qualifications	POPULATION GROUP							
	Black		White		Coloured		Indian	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes, adequate	10	62,50	8	38,10	4	23,53	12	38,71
Partly adequate	5	31,25	13	61,90	12	70,59	17	54,84
No, inadequate	1	6,24			1	5,88	1	3,23
No response							1	3,23
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>100,00</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>100,00</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>100,00</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>100,00</b>

Comment

- There is an obvious disparity between what teachers themselves think of their qualifications and how it is objectively viewed. One wonders whether they have a true understanding of what they really need to be good teachers when in one case (Black

schools) 31,25 per cent have no training at all in history and they still regard that as at least partly adequate.

- At the same time it is revealing that above 50 per cent of the teachers in other departments who in general has fairly good qualifications

do not regard their training as adequate. The problem area seems to be more with the method of history teaching than with the knowledge of history content as the following table seems to indicate.

**TABLE 2.11 PROBLEM AREAS IN TRAINING**

	POPULATION GROUP							
	Black		White		Coloured		Indian	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Subject didactics	5	31,25	9	42,86	7	41,18	11	35,48
Subject content	1	6,25	1	4,76	5	29,41	6	19,35
Both			3	14,29	1	5,88	1	3,23

- Although subject content is not rated as as serious a problem than method of teaching, the teaching of South African history presents more problems to teachers in non-white schools than to teachers in white schools. On the one hand this is understandable because it is linked to the legitimacy and impartiality of what is regarded as Euro-centric or white-biased content. On the other hand one would expect General History with its unfamiliar

setting, characters and issues to present serious problems to Black schools and to be regarded as Euro-centric. According to the next table this is not the case. One can draw the conclusion that the definition of what presents a problem area is based exclusively on political-legitimacy considerations and not on the intrinsic degree of difficulty involved in mastering a particular content.

**TABLE 2.12 PROBLEM AREAS IN THE SUBJECT CONTENT**

	POPULATION GROUP							
	Black		White		Coloured		Indian	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
SA History	5	31,25	2	9,52	6	35,29	9	29,03
General History			1	4,76	1	5,88	3	9,68
Both			4	19,05	1	5,88	1	3,23

3. What do teachers regard as the most important aims in the teaching of history?

TABLE 2.18

GENERAL AIMS IN THE TEACHING OF HISTORY

	Res- ponse	POPULATION GROUP							
		Black		White		Coloured		Indian	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
a) Personal develop- ment of pupils	Yes	9	56,25	20	95,23	12	70,59	19	61,29
	No	1	6,25			5	29,41	5	16,13
b) Development and understanding of a sense of citi- zenship	Yes	7	43,75	16	76,19	5	23,53	17	54,84
	No	3	18,75	2	9,52	10	58,82	7	22,58
c) Development of positive attitudes and values	Yes	7	43,75	17	80,95	8	47,06	19	61,29
	No	3	18,75	1	4,76	8	47,06	7	22,58
d) Appreciation of heritage of other people and cul- tures	Yes	8	50,00	17	80,95	7	41,18	26	83,87
	No	2	12,50	2	9,52	8	47,06	3	9,68
e) Understanding of the unique nature of individuals and events	Yes	10	62,50	18	85,71	12	70,59	19	61,29
	No					4	23,53	5	16,13
f) Understanding of history as an academic discipline	Yes	10	62,50	14	66,67	8	47,06	20	64,52
	No			4	19,05	7	41,18	3	9,68

Comment

There are a number of noteworthy trends in the responses to the six general aims listed in the question.

- The very low rating of citizenship by teachers in Coloured Schools - almost half that of Black and Indian Schools. At the same time it is a highly rated aim for white schools.
- The relatively low rating of understanding history as an academic discipline in Coloured schools as against an average of above 60% in the other schools. The same applies to appreciation of the heritage of other peoples

and culture and the development of positive attitudes and values. In these two aims White and Indian schools tend to correlate while Coloured and Black schools are closer to each other.

- Personal development receives a surprisingly low rating in Black and Indian schools and fairly high in Coloured schools. It is only in White schools that this aim received the high level of support one would expect.

- It would seem that the Black schools in general tend to give a relatively low score to these aims overall. Is it a matter of not having definite views on what the aims should be, or could they have a different perception of what the aims should be?

- The important gap between white schools and the rest on aims b, c and d is indicative of the way in which the teachers in these schools have distanced themselves from what is traditionally regarded as basic aims in the teaching of history.

4. What would teachers like to be included in the syllabus that would ensure more and closer identification with the aims?

This question follows naturally on the last remark. The next table clearly shows the difference in approach between teachers in white schools who do not respond in the same rating as other teachers do

on History of Africa, the history of the Black people in South Africa, apartheid and the history of liberation movements.

TABLE 2.24 TOPICS IN THE SYLLABUSES

Topics	Res- ponse *	POPULATION GROUP							
		Black		White		Coloured		Indian	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
a) The History of Africa	1	11	68,75	11	52,38	12	70,59	21	67,74
	2	3	18,75	9	42,86	4	23,53	7	22,58
	3			1	4,76	1	5,88	3	9,68
b) Culture history	1	4	25,00	4	19,05	1	5,88	11	35,48
	2	10	62,50	8	38,10	12	70,59	15	48,39
	3	2	12,50	9	42,86	4	23,53	5	16,13
c) Ideologies	1	13	81,25	15	71,43	10	58,82	25	80,65
	2	3	18,75	6	28,57	7	41,18	6	19,35
d) The history of the black man in SA	1	15	93,75	12	57,14	16	94,12	23	74,19
	2	1	6,25	9	42,86			7	22,58
	3					1	5,88	1	3,23
e) Problems of multi-cultural societies in overseas countries	1	7	43,75	4	19,05	7	41,18	14	45,16
	2	8	50,00	15	71,43	10	58,82	10	32,26
	3	1	6,25	2	9,52			6	19,35
f) "Apartheid"	1	10	62,50	4	19,05	12	70,59	20	64,52
	2	4	25,00	16	76,19	2	11,76	6	19,35
	3	1	6,25	1	4,76	3	17,65	5	16,13
g) History of liberation movements in South Africa	1	16	100,00	9	42,86	16	94,12	27	87,10
	2			11	52,38			4	12,90
	3			1	4,76	1	5,88		

h) Contemporary history	1	14	87,50	19	90,48	14	82,35	24	77,42
	2	2	12,50	2	9,52	1	5,88	6	19,35
	3					2	11,76	1	3,23
i) Precolonial history of SA	1	9	56,25	3	14,29	2	11,76	6	19,35
	2	6	37,50	7	33,33	11	64,71	13	41,49
	3	1	6,25	11	52,38	3	17,65	12	38,71
j) An introduction to archeology	1	4	25,00	1	4,76	2	11,76	4	12,90
	2	9	56,25	6	28,57	7	41,18	11	35,49
	3	3	18,75	14	66,67	8	47,06	15	48,39
k) Dispossession of land	1	11	68,75	1	4,76	9	52,94	11	35,48
	2	4	25,00	12	57,14	6	35,29	14	45,16
	3	1	6,25	8	38,10	2	11,76	6	19,35
l) Capitalism and class struggles	1	13	81,25	4	19,05	6	35,29	16	51,61
	2	2	12,50	15	71,43	11	64,71	14	45,16
	3	1	6,25	2	9,52			1	3,23
m) Trade unions	1	12	75,00	6	28,57	10	58,82	18	58,06
	2	4	25,00	12	57,14	7	41,18	12	38,71
	3			3	14,29			1	3,23
Other	1	9	56,25	7	33,33	7	41,18	16	51,61
	2	2	12,50	3	14,29	5	29,41	7	22,58
	3							1	3,23

- \* 1 = Included but elaborated  
 2 = Included but reduced  
 3 = Excluded

### Comment

- It is quite obvious that teachers in Black schools prefer political issues with which they can identify themselves than more neutral, academic topics.
- At the same time teachers in white schools seem to be fairly sceptical about such an approach and are more inclined to opt for purely historical and less partisan topics.
- Teachers in Coloured and Indian schools do not view topics in the same mould as teachers in Black schools. Note their low rating in items k, l and m but their similar high ratings on items f and g.
- This survey confirms the popularity of contemporary history. Surprisingly enough for the strong believers in the skills approach their is little interest in precolonial history and archeology.

5. What do teachers regard as the most important educational results of the teaching of history?

This is only an excerpt from a long list to indicate a few of the surprise findings.

TABLE 2.25 VIEWS ON HISTORY AS A SCHOOL SUBJECT

Opinions on teaching and the syllabus	Res- ponse *	POPULATION GROUP							
		Black		White		Coloured		Indian	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
a) Transmits the system of values of the society	1	13	81,25	7	33,33	9	52,94	16	51,61
	2	2	12,50	6	30,00	5	29,41	11	35,48
	3			3	14,29	2	11,76	1	3,23
	4	1	6,25	4	19,05	1	5,88	2	6,45
b) The teacher's philosophy of life will influence the way in which he presents the subject content	1	11	68,75	5	23,81	4	23,53	11	35,48
	2	5	31,25	8	38,10	5	29,41	14	45,16
	3			4	19,05	2	11,76	5	16,13
	4			4	19,05	6	35,29	1	3,23
c) Be made aware of the diverse perspectives	1	14	87,50	19	90,48	16	94,12	29	93,55
	2	2	12,50	2	9,52	1	5,88	2	6,45
d) History test-books are Eurocentric	1	11	68,75	6	28,57	9	52,94	20	64,52
	2	4	25,00	8	38,10	6	35,29	8	25,81
	3			5	23,81	1	5,88	1	3,23
	4	1	6,25	2	9,52	1	5,88	2	6,45
e) Development of History skills such as logic and reasoning unnecessary	1	5	31,25					6	19,35
	2	3	18,75	1	4,76	2	12,5	6	19,35
	3			3	14,29	5	31,25	3	9,68
	4	8	50,00	17	80,29	9	56,25	15	48,39

- \* 1 = Fully agree  
 2 = Agree to a reasonable extent  
 3 = Agree to a lesser extent  
 4 = Do not agree at all

Comment

- One of the surprise findings when compared with the misgivings of teachers in Black schools on the general aims of history teaching is their relatively high rating of items a and e as against the low rating of these items in white schools. It could indicate a stronger commitment by the latter to impartial and more objective teaching.
- The low rating and limited support for the skills approach in Black, Coloured and Indian schools.

6. What do teachers regard as the most critical issues in evaluation?

This table represents only a sample of the responses. It does indicate that the often quoted

dissatisfaction of teachers with the quantity of work and the system of evaluation is valid.

TABLE 2.31 VIEWS ON STATEMENTS ON EVALUATION AND EXAMINATION

Views on statements	Response *	POPULATION GROUP							
		Black		White		Coloured		Indian	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
b) Attaining high marks in History is more difficult	1	4	25,00	8	38,10	1	5,88	3	9,68
	2	4	25,00	8	38,10	3	17,65	11	35,48
	3	5	31,25	2	9,52	8	47,06	9	29,03
	4	3	18,75	3	14,29	5	29,41	8	25,81
c) A high premium placed on memorizing prepared questions	1	2	12,50	6	28,57	2	11,76	4	12,90
	2	4	25,00	6	28,57	6	35,29	17	54,84
	3	4	25,00	2	9,52	7	41,18	7	22,58
	4	6	37,50	6	28,57	2	11,76	3	9,68
d) Too large a volume of work for examination	1	6	37,50	10	47,62	1	5,88	15	48,39
	2	3	18,75	6	28,57	7	41,18	10	32,26
	3	5	31,25	3	14,29	6	35,29	4	12,90
	4	2	12,50	2	9,52	2	11,76	2	6,45
f) Schedules for marking should be flexible and leave room for initiative, independence and insight in formulating answers	1	14	87,50	17	80,95	16	94,12	29	93,55
	2	2	12,50	3	14,29	1	5,88	2	6,45
	3			1	4,76				
	4								
g) Evaluation of skills should receive more attention during in-service training	1	13	81,25	16	76,19	6	35,29	22	70,97
	2	1	6,25	5	23,81	7	41,18	8	25,81
	3	2	12,50			2	11,76		
	4					1	5,88		
j) Use of a greater variety of questions	1	14	87,50	11	52,38	11	64,71	26	83,87
	2	1	6,25	7	33,33	4	23,53	3	9,68
	3	1	6,25	1	4,76	2	11,76	1	3,23
	4			2	9,52			1	3,23

- 1 = Fully agree
- 2 = Agree to a reasonable extent
- 3 = Agree to a lesser extent
- 4 = Do not agree at all

### Comment

- In future planning of history syllabuses more attention should be given to designing a new system of evaluation that could achieve the following.
- Ensure high marks for those pupils who succeed in achieving 90%+ in other school subjects. There is no valid reason why a pupil should not receive full marks for a good essay answer.
- More emphasis on evaluating skills.
- Greater variety in the type, form and substance of questions.
- More flexibility in the external marking of papers.
- A very careful definition of the quantity of work that could be mastered at different levels. No attention has yet been given to the factors that determine the scope of work that can or should be covered at a particular age level.

### 7. Why do pupils decide to take a course in history in their final years at secondary school?

The variety of responses by teachers to this issue is a clear indication that the value of history as a school subject is viewed entirely different by white,

Black, Coloured and Indian teachers. Does this represent a true sample of the position of teachers?

**TABLE 2.32 REASONS FOR CHOOSING HISTORY IN THE SENIOR STANDARDS**

Reasons for choosing History	POPULATION GROUP							
	Black		White		Coloured		Indian	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
a) Mastered by rote learning, little insight required			2	9,52	2	11,76	1	3,23
b) Few optional subjects offered	4	25,00			8	47,06		
c) Pupils are genuinely interested	1	6,25	9	42,86	5	29,41	8	25,81
d) Provide them with political literacy	6	37,50			1	5,88	2	6,45
e) Influenced by their parents								
f) Teacher very popular with pupils	1	6,25	2	9,52			1	3,23
g) Std 7 teacher encourages them to continue			3	14,29			10	32,26
h) Suitable for less gifted pupils	4	25,00	3	14,29	1	5,88	7	22,58

### Comment

- Subject options available in Black and Coloured schools has an important influence on pupils choice.
- Teachers do not rate their persuasive influence or examples very high - item f. This conflicts with the findings of the investigation of white schools only where the influence of the teacher in standards 6 and 7 is rated fairly high.
- The high rating for political literacy in Black schools represents an interesting side comment on their dissatisfaction with the Euro-centric content.

NB SEE OUR COMPETITION FOR  
SECONDARY AND PRIMARY PUPILS

### FOOTNOTE

- 1 An empirical investigation into the teaching of history in the RSA. HSRC Education Research Programme no. 19, 1991. Obtainable from HSRC Publishers, 134 Pretorius Street, Pretoria 0001.